



Michael Turner Presents

ASPEN

#1

OF 2
COVER A

MICHAEL
TURNER

Plot



Fathom Created by
Michael Turner

Issue One of Two



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writer

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PETER STEIGERWALD
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DREAMER DESIGN
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WATER IS LIFE.

IT IS WHERE ALL LIFE BEGAN.
WHERE MY LIFE BEGAN.



MY LIFE.



I HAVE ALWAYS
BEEN FASCINATED
BY THE OCEANS.

GROWING UP, MY ADOPTIVE
FATHER TOOK ME TO EVERY
MARINE BIOLOGIST IN
THE SAN DIEGO AREA. IT
WAS THE ONLY TIME THAT
THIS SHY LITTLE GIRL
WOULD REALLY SPEAK.

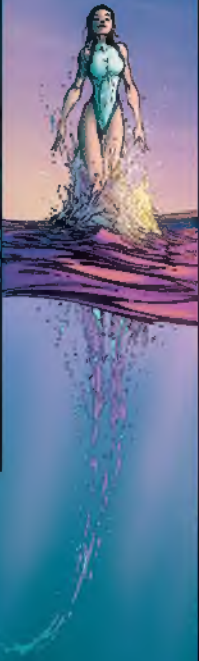
ASK QUESTION
AFTER QUESTION.

I COULDN'T TALK
WITH THEM ENOUGH--

--SO I BECAME ONE MYSELF.
TOP OF MY CLASS, TOO. I WAS
EVEN OFFERED ACCESS TO THE
GOVERNMENT'S SECRET
UNDERSEA OPERATIONS.

I THOUGHT I WAS ON THE RIGHT
TRACK-- UNTIL SOMEONE TOLD ME
I "WASN'T NUMAN." I WAS--

--"OF THE WATER."



BORN IN A WORLD NO ONE
KNOWS EXISTS, A HIDDEN RACE
LIVING IN THE OCEANS, THEY
CALL THEMSELVES THE BLUE.



BUT I WAS DIFFERENT
THAN EVEN THE BLUE, NOT
JUST BECAUSE OF WHERE
I WAS RAISED--

--BUT BECAUSE OF
WHAT I COULD DO.

THERE WERE NO
WAVES THIS MORNING.

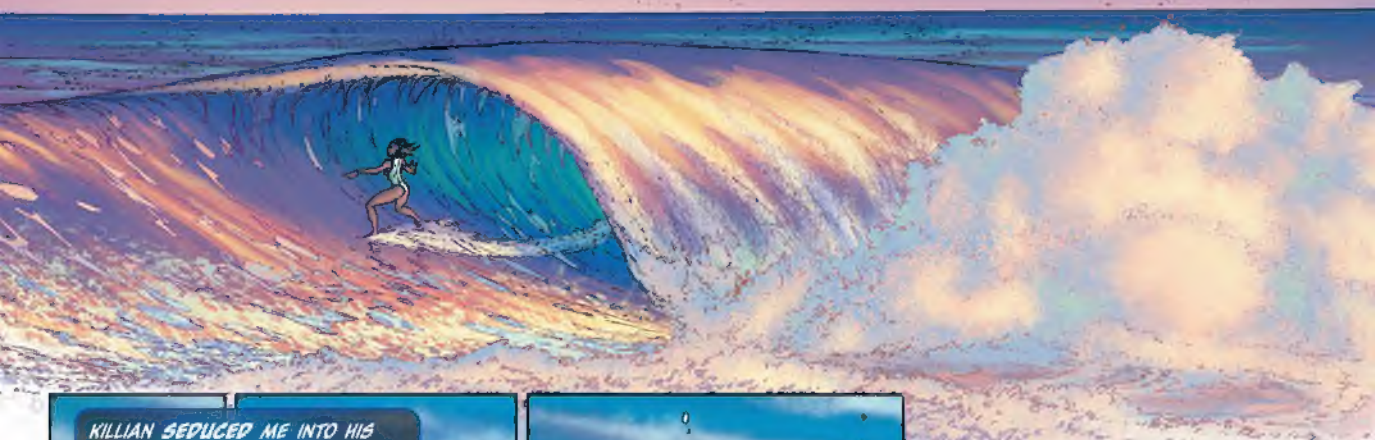


I WANTED TO
GO SURFING.

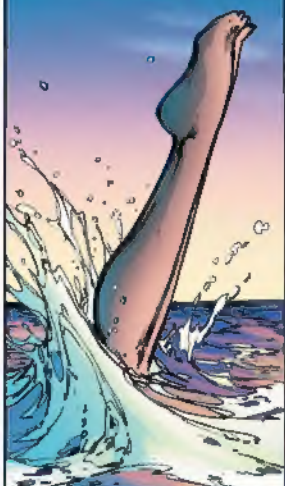


SO I MADE SOME.

I CAN MOVE WATER WITH
A THOUGHT. I CAN BECOME
WATER WITH ANOTHER.

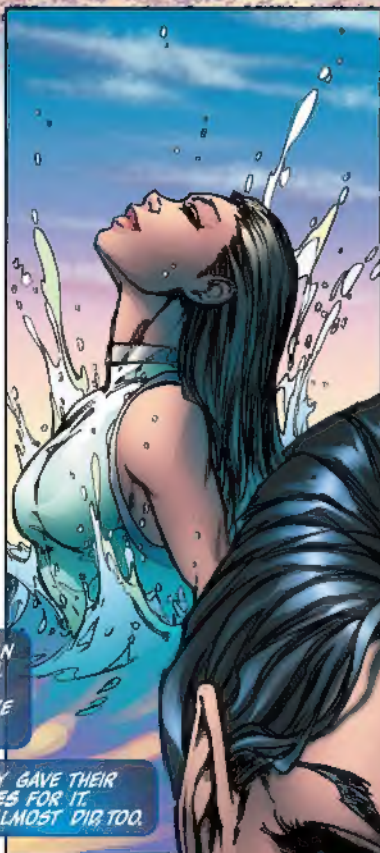


KILLIAN SEDUCED ME INTO HIS
GRASP BECAUSE OF THIS TELLING
ME MY DESTINY WAS TO LEAD AN
ATTACK ON THE SURFACE WORLD.



BUT THE TRUTH IS-- KILLIAN
MURDERED MY BIOLOGICAL
PARENTS, AND MY PARENTS
WANTED NOTHING BUT PEACE
BETWEEN MY TWO WORLDS.

THEY GAVE THEIR
LIVES FOR IT.
I ALMOST DID TOO.



I KNOW WHERE
I COME FROM.

I KNOW
WHO I AM.



AND I'M READY
FOR WHATEVER
TOMORROW BRINGS.





WATER IS LIFE.



BUT THAT HAS
BEEN FORGOTTEN.

IGNORER

THE WATERS SHOULD
BE RESPECTED

AND IF NOT
RESPECTED-- FEARER





THE FIRST WORLD
THE DEEP SEA.

THE BLACK.

IT HAS BEEN EONS
SINCE I HAVE
TASTED THE AIR,
BUT NOW...

SPOILED LIKE
OUR SURFACE
WATERS POISONED
AND DISCARDED

NO MORE.

THIS NEW DAY WILL
NOT BE AN EASY ONE.

BALANCE
MUST BE
RESTORED.

WATER IS LIFE.



*BUT WATER CAN
ALSO BE DEATH.*

BLACK

I AM SURROUNDED BY IT.

EVERYTHING BEFORE I TURNED
ELEVEN. BEFORE I WAS FOUND
ON THAT SHIP.

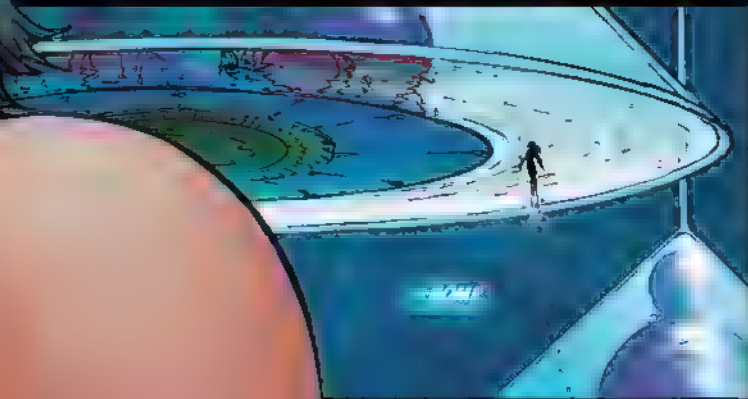
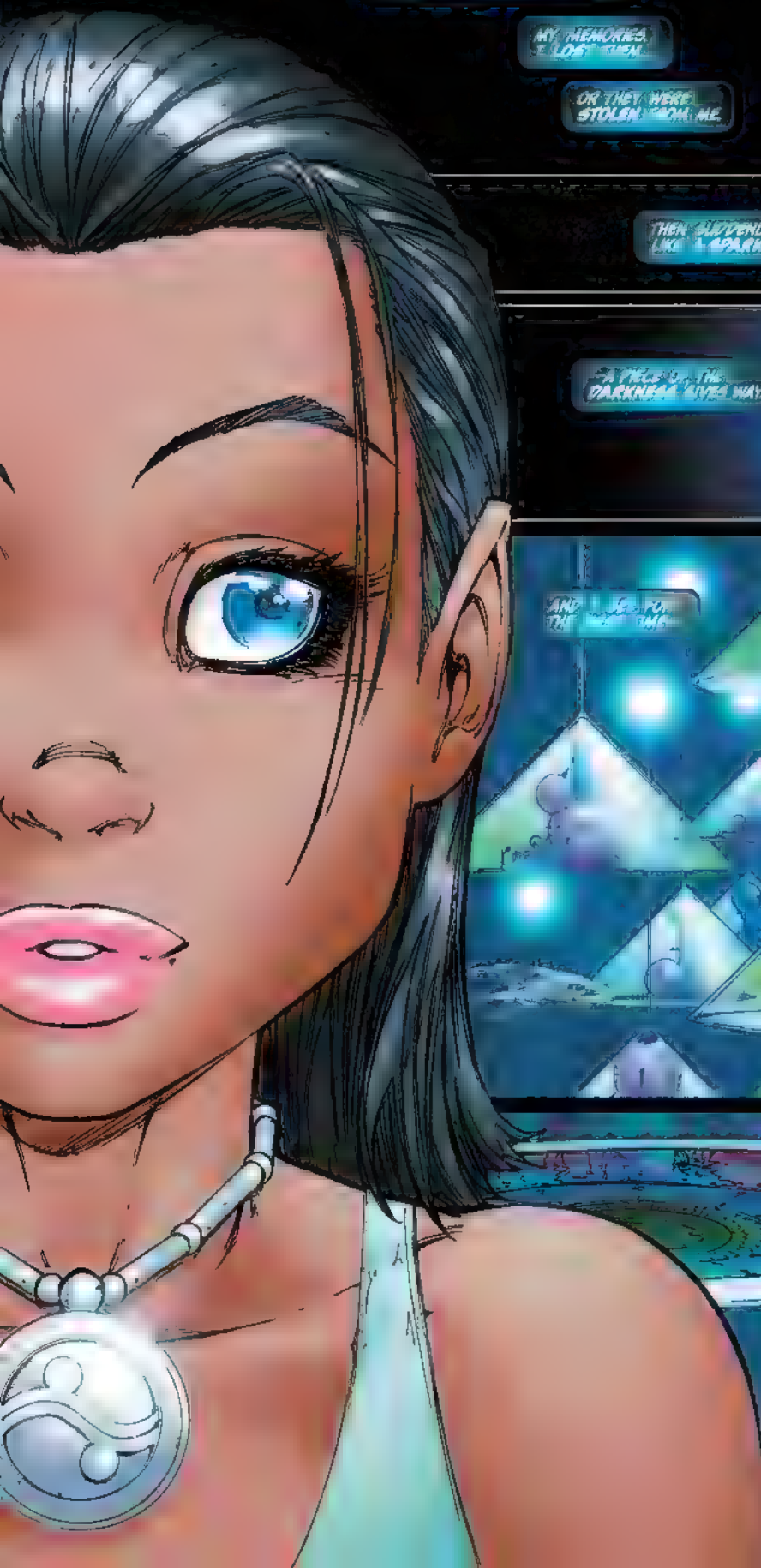
MY MEMORIES
I LOST THEM.

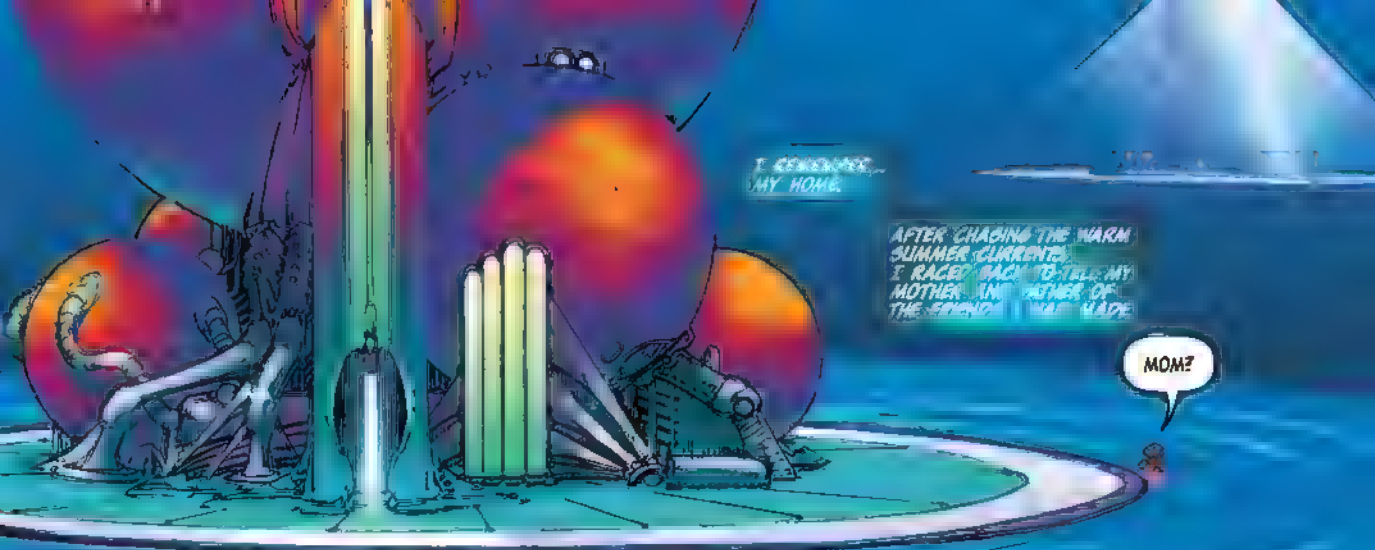
OR THEY WERE
STOLEN FROM ME.

THEN SUDDENLY
LIKE A SPARK—

A PIECE OF THE
DARKNESS MILES AWAY.

AND THE DARKNESS
WAS THERE.

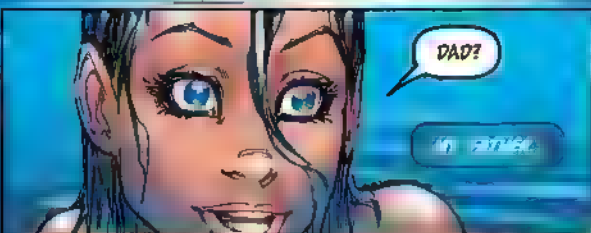




I REMEMBER MY HOME.

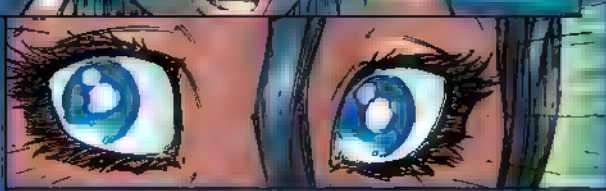
AFTER CHASING THE WARM SUMMER CURRENTS, I RACED BACK TO TELL MY MOTHER AND FATHER OF THE FRIEND I HAD MADE.

MOM?



DAD?

IN DISTANCE



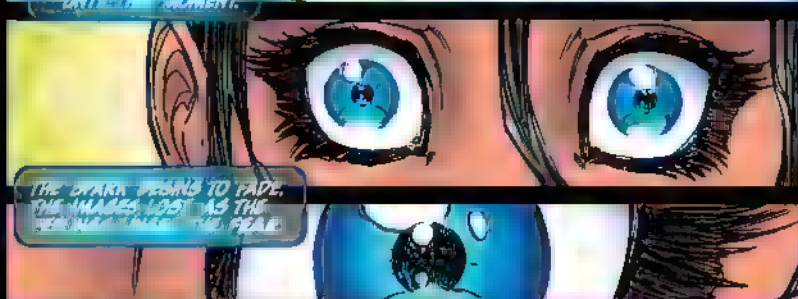
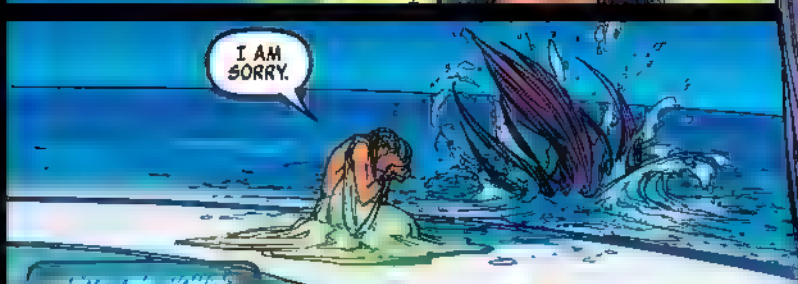
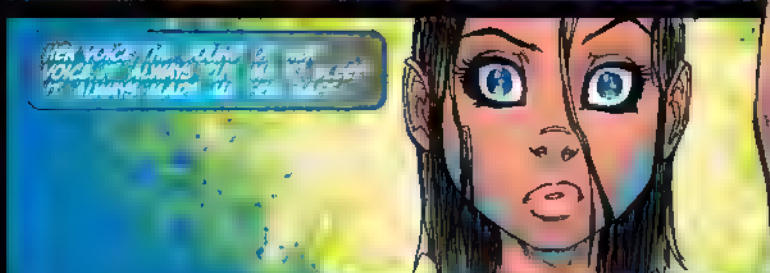
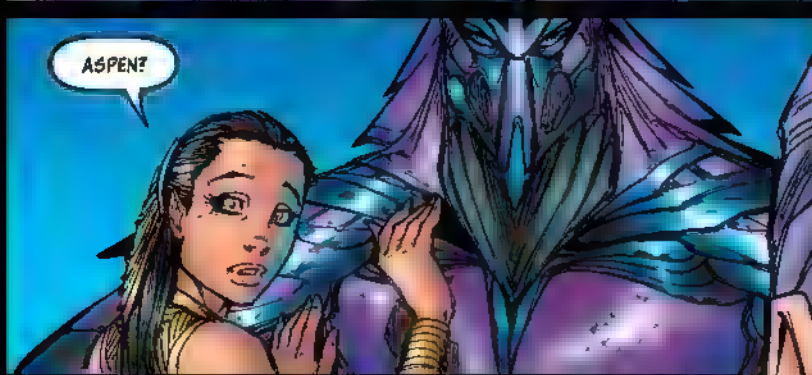
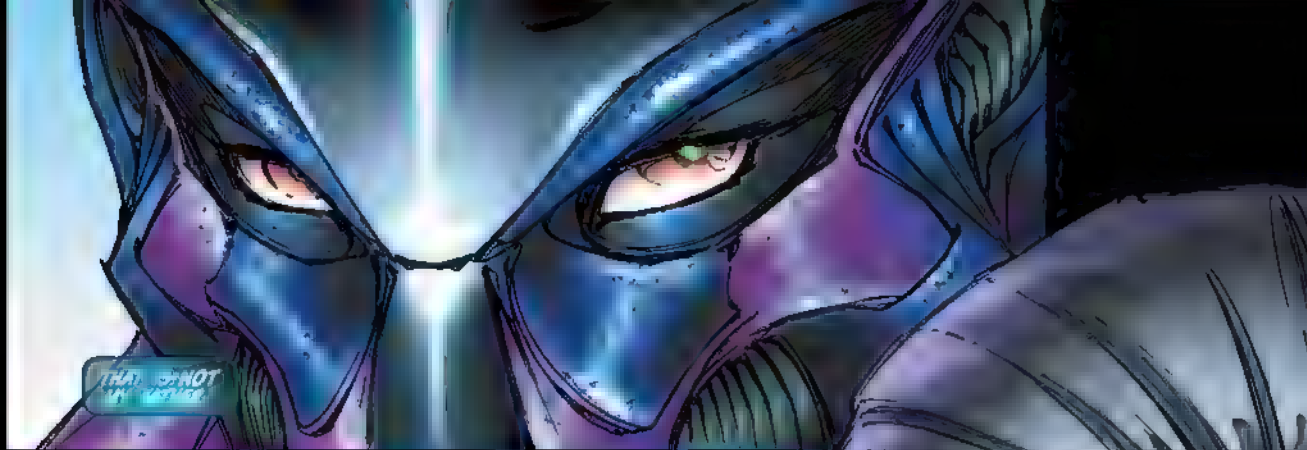
THIS IS NOT HER DESTINY. YOU ARE RIGHT.

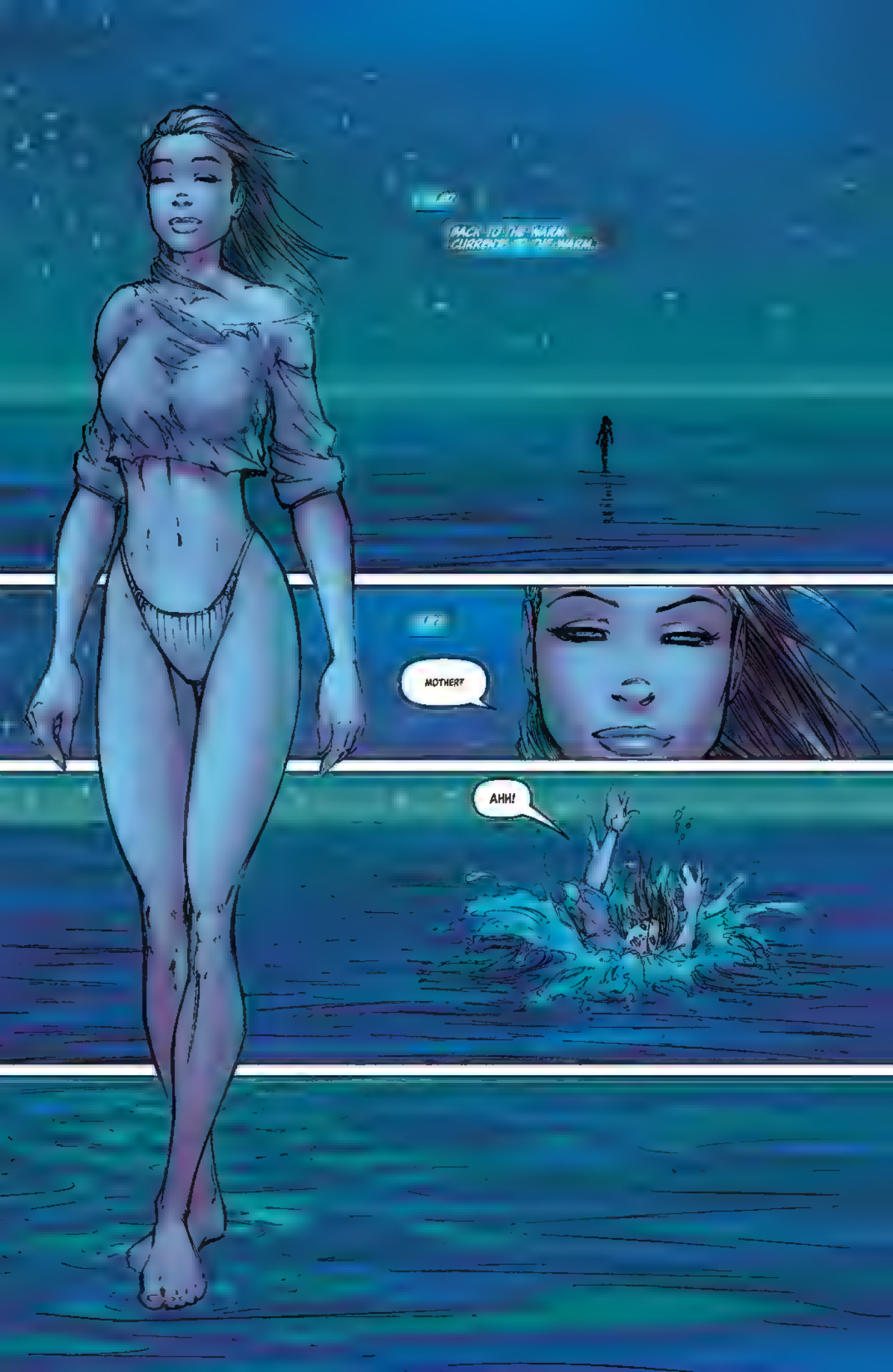
THIS IS OUR PEOPLE'S DESTINY. IT MUST BE DONE.

THE LANGUAGE TURNING MY EARS HAVE NOT HEARD.

—TODAY.



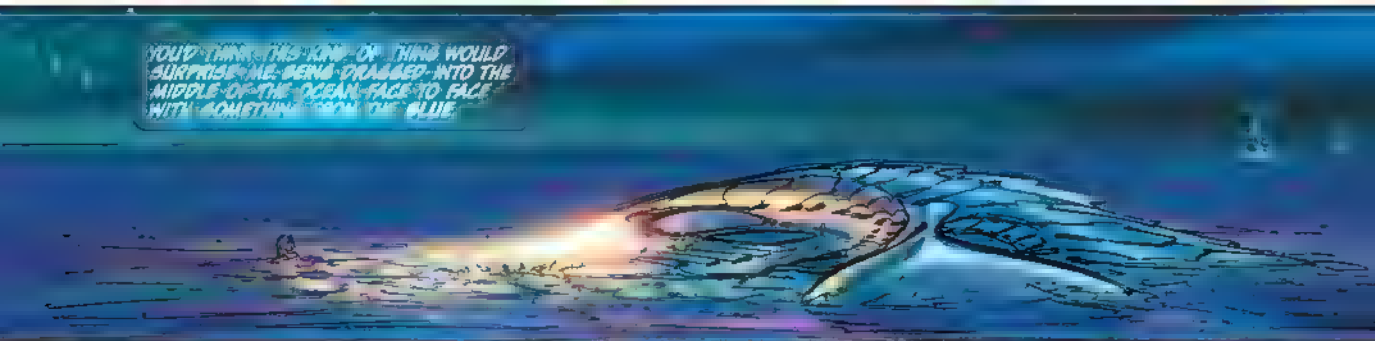
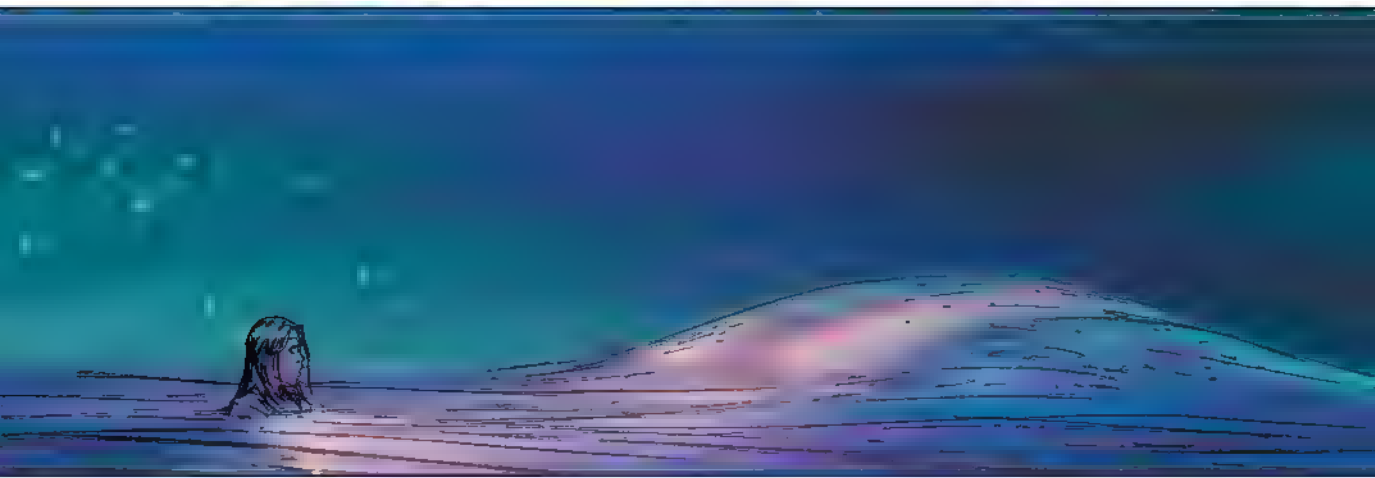




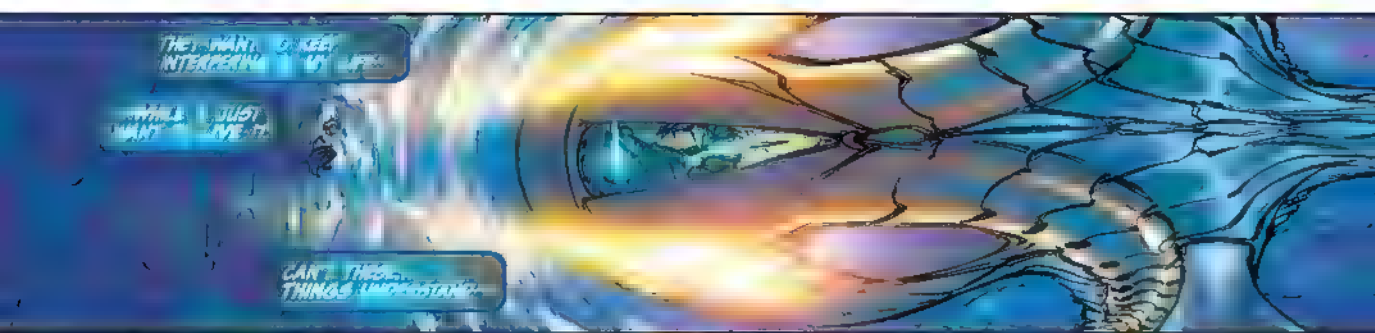
BACK TO THE WARM
CURRENT TO THE WARM

MOTHER?

AHH!



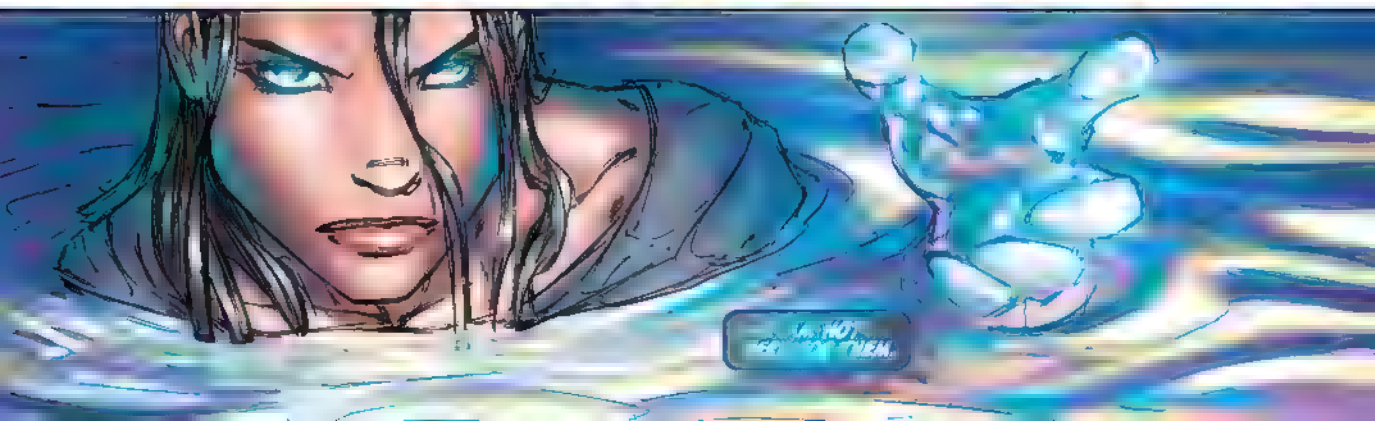
YOU'D THINK THE KIND OF THING WOULD SURPRISE ME BEING DRAGGED INTO THE MIDDLE OF THE OCEAN FACE TO FACE WITH SOMETHING FROM THE BLUE



THEY WANT TO KEEP INTERFERING IN MY LIFE

WHILE I JUST WANT TO LIVE IT

CAN'T THESE THINGS UNDERSTAND

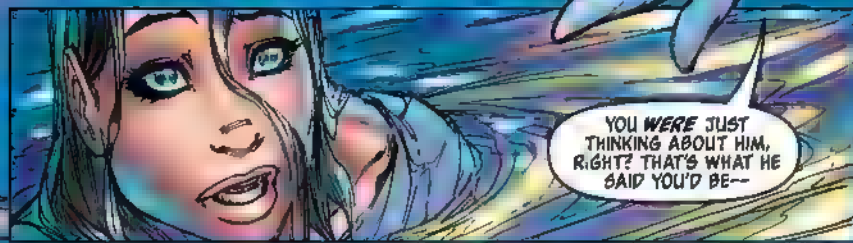


DO NOT TEST ME ON THEM



I'M SUPPOSED
TO TELL YOU--
--COME WITH
ME IF YOU WANT TO
LEARN MORE ABOUT
YOUR FATHER.

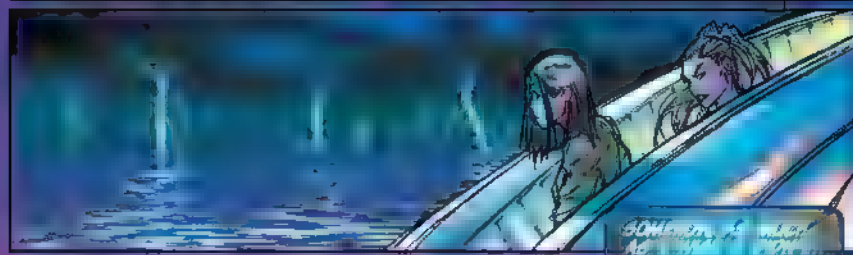
MY FATHER?



YOU *WERE* JUST
THINKING ABOUT HIM,
RIGHT? THAT'S WHAT HE
SAID YOU'D BE--



FORGET IT.
WE NEED TO
MOVE *NOW*.



SOMEONE'S
IN THE BOAT
WITH US



ADMIRAL, YOU
MAY WANT TO
RETHINK THIS.



YOU'RE
STIRRING UP A
HORNET'S NEST
WITH YOUR...
PROGRAM.

AND IF THE
PRESIDENT GETS
WORD OF--

THE *PRESIDENT*
WILL *NOT* DOCTOR
GARRISON.



OUR LITTLE
PROJECT--

-- IS *OUTSIDE* HIS
JURISDICTION.

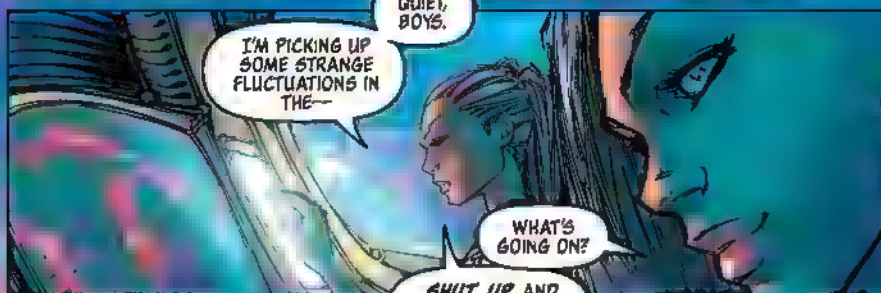
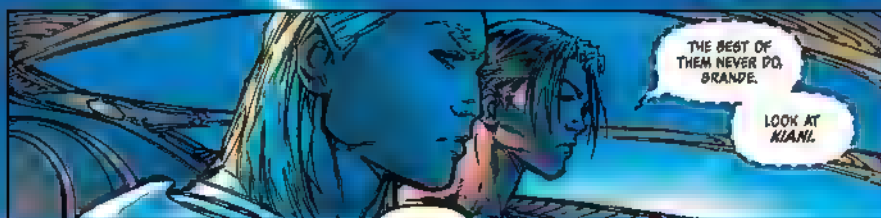
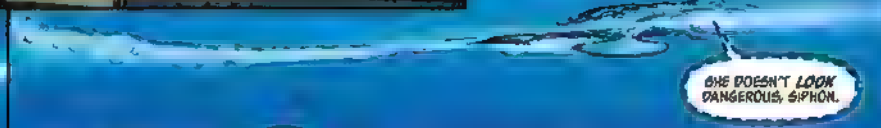
YOU NEED TO
UNDERSTAND I DON'T
DO THIS BECAUSE I *LIKE*
IT. I DO IT BECAUSE
I BELIEVE IN THE *RED*,
WHITE, AND *BLUE*.

I DO IT BECAUSE
MY *FATHER* GAVE HIS
LIFE TO *PROTECT* OUR
COUNTRY FROM OUTSIDE
FORCES THAT EVEN TODAY
THREATEN TO TEAR
IT APART.

YOU'VE SEEN WHAT
HAPPENS WHEN THIS
COUNTRY *RESTS* ON
ITS *LAURELS*--

--I'M SEEING TO IT
THAT WE *NEVER* DO
AGAIN.





--INTERRUPT THIS PROGRAM WITH REPORTS THROUGHOUT THE STATES OF MICHIGAN, OHIO, ILLINOIS, MINNESOTA, AND--

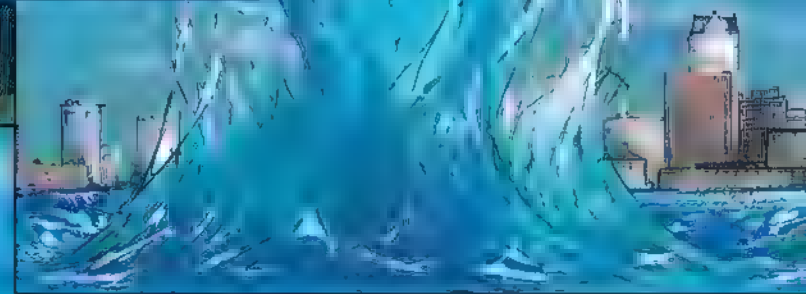
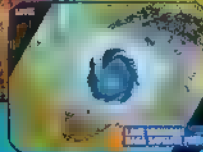
--RIVERS, STREAMS, LAKES... ALL DRAINING INTO THE GROUND WE CAN'T EXPLAIN--

--MY GOD SEVERAL SHIPS HAVE JUST CAPSIZED IN THE HARBORS OF--

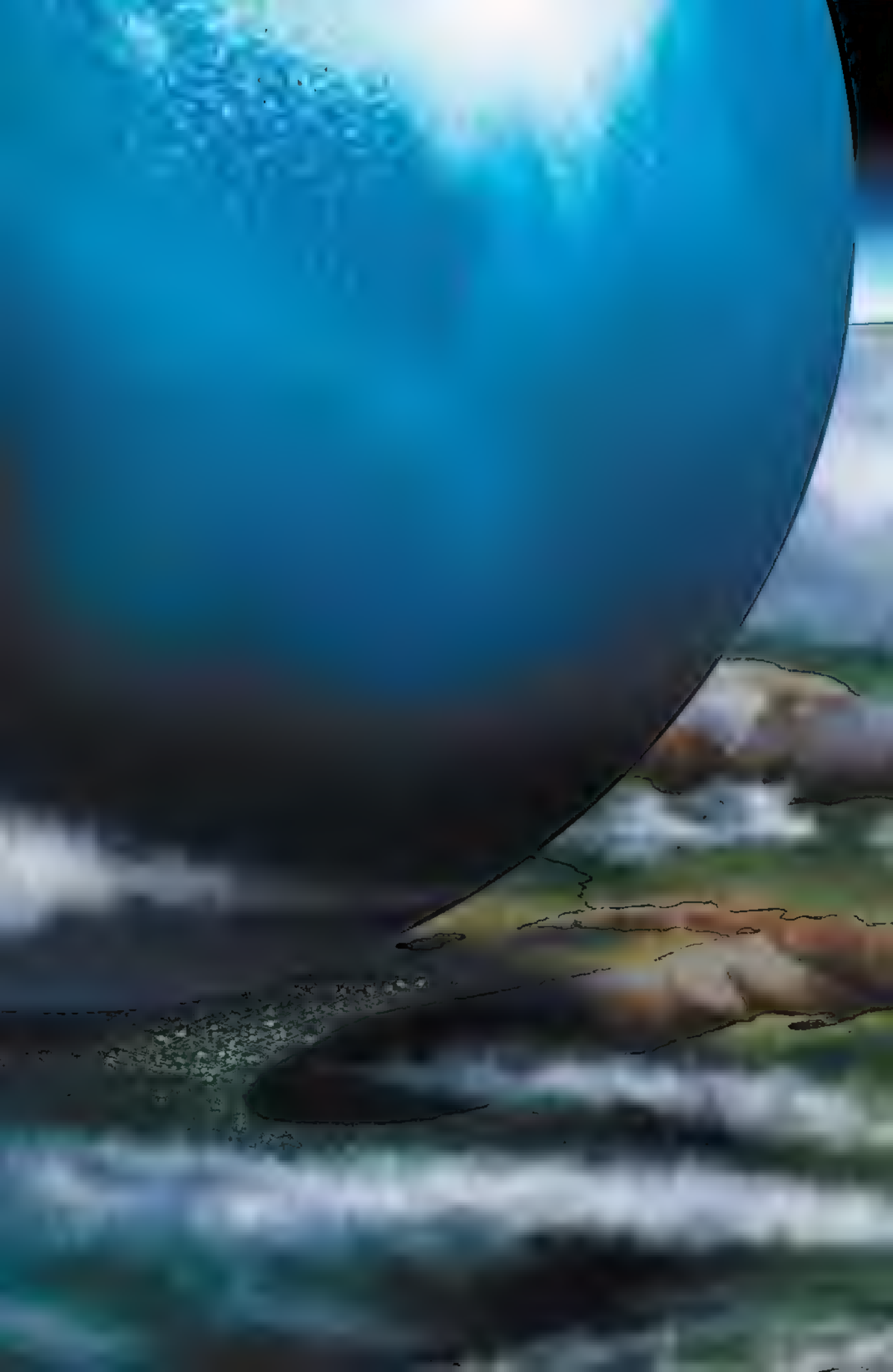
COMPUTER ENHANCED SATELLITE IMAGE

—ASKED NOT
TO PANIC—

—PEOPLE ALONG
THE BEACHES JUST
GOT DRAGGED
RIGHT INTO—



—WE GO
LIVE TO—





...

WE ARE
EXPERIENCING
TECHNICAL
DIFFICULTIES.

PLEASE
STAND BY.

To Be
Continued...



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Issue Two of Two



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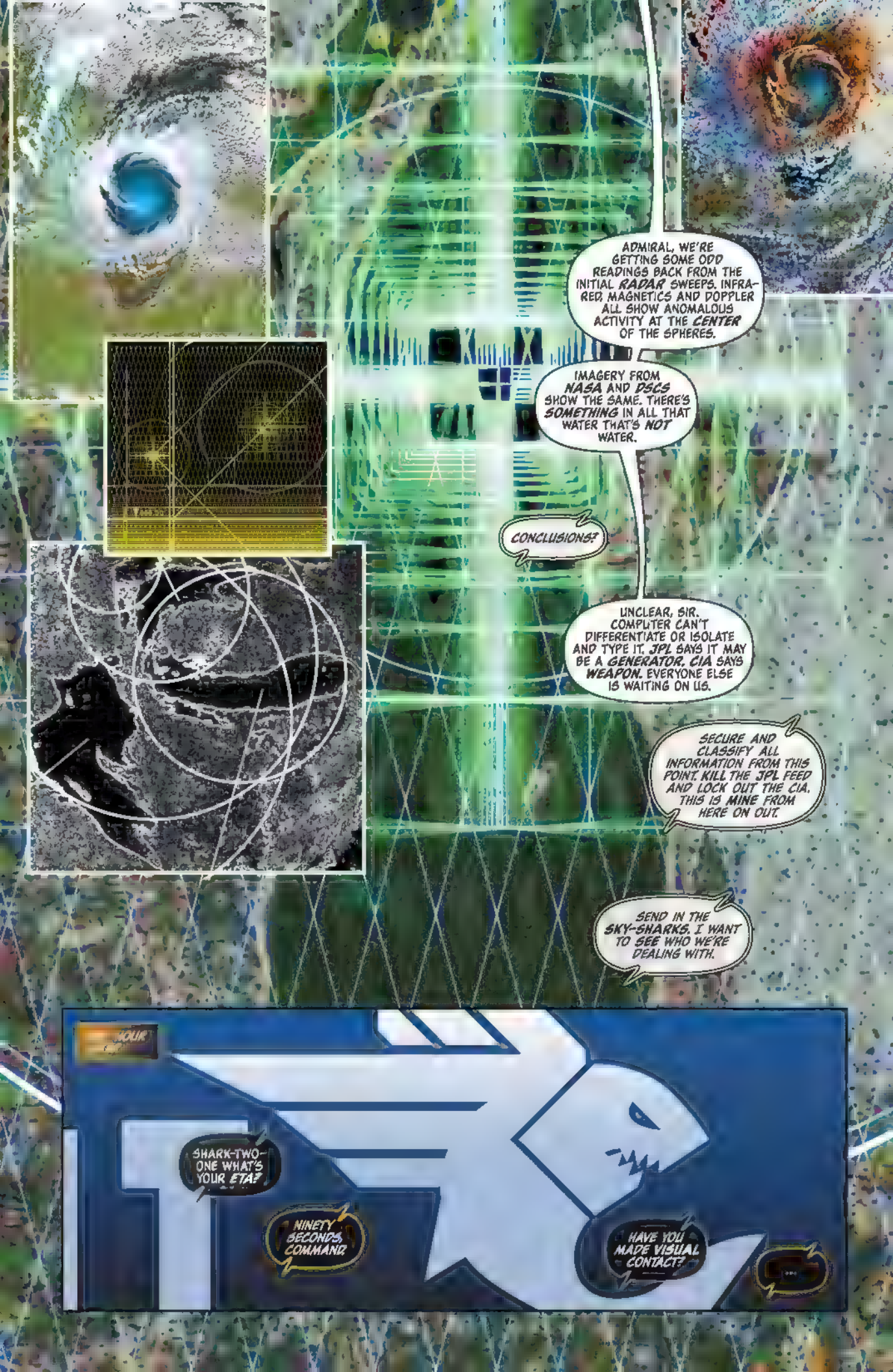
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ADMIRAL, WE'RE
GETTING SOME ODD
READINGS BACK FROM THE
INITIAL **RADAR** SWEEPS. **INFR-**
RED, **MAGNETICS** AND **DOPPLER**
ALL SHOW ANOMALOUS
ACTIVITY AT THE **CENTER**
OF THE **SPHERES**.

IMAGERY FROM
NASA AND **DSCS**
SHOW THE SAME. THERE'S
SOMETHING IN ALL THAT
WATER THAT'S **NOT**
WATER.

CONCLUSIONS?

UNCLEAR, SIR.
COMPUTER CAN'T
DIFFERENTIATE OR ISOLATE
AND TYPE IT. **JPL** SAYS IT MAY
BE A **GENERATOR**. **CIA** SAYS
WEAPON. EVERYONE ELSE
IS WAITING ON US.

SECURE AND
CLASSIFY ALL
INFORMATION FROM THIS
POINT. **KILL** THE **JPL** FEED
AND **LOCK** OUT THE **CIA**.
THIS IS **MINE** FROM
HERE ON OUT.

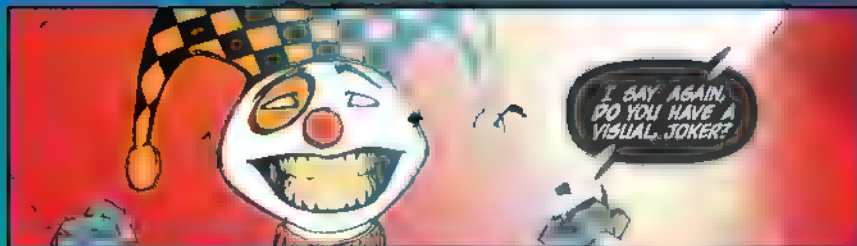
SEND IN THE
SKY-SHARKS. I WANT
TO SEE WHO WE'RE
DEALING WITH.

SHARK-TWO-
ONE WHAT'S
YOUR ETA?

NINETY
SECONDS
COMMAND

HAVE YOU
MADE VISUAL
CONTACT?





I SAY AGAIN,
DO YOU HAVE A
VISUAL, JOKER?



DO I HAVE
A VISUAL?



ARE YOU
KIDDING
ME?



NOTE

REMEMBER, JOKER,
THIS IS SIMPLY RECON. SAT
IMAGES SHOW... SOMETHING
WITHIN THE CENTER OF EACH
SPHERE YOU GET IN, YOU TAKE
A PICTURE YOU GET OUT.

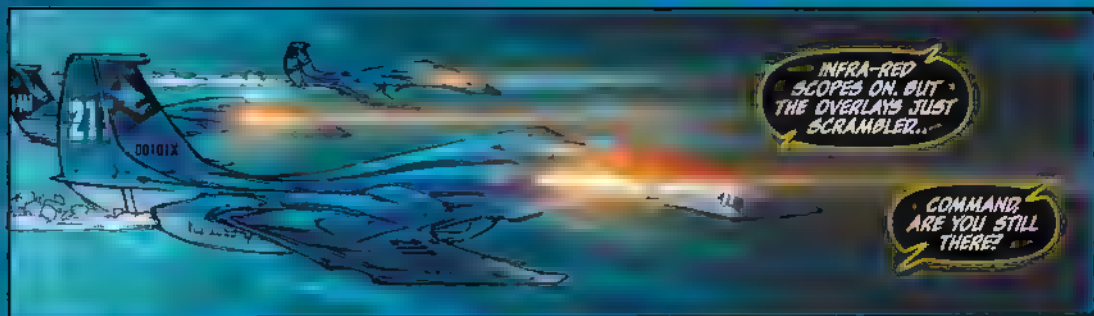
NO
ARGUMENTS HERE
COMMAND

HOW THE
HELL WE LET
YOU TALK US
INTO THIS

YOU AND BIG BIRD
WERE THE ONLY TWO
PILOTS IN FLIGHT SCHOOL
THAT COULD KEEP UP
COTTON.

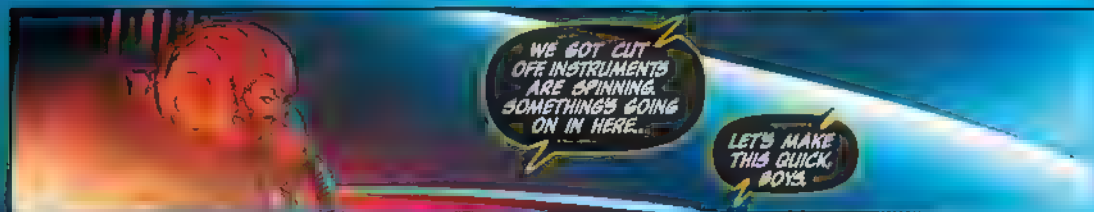
YOU ACT AS IF
YOU WON EVERY
RACE, JOKER.

I DIR



INFRA-RED
SCOPES ON, BUT
THE OVERLAYS JUST
SCRAMBLER...

COMMAND,
ARE YOU STILL
THERE?



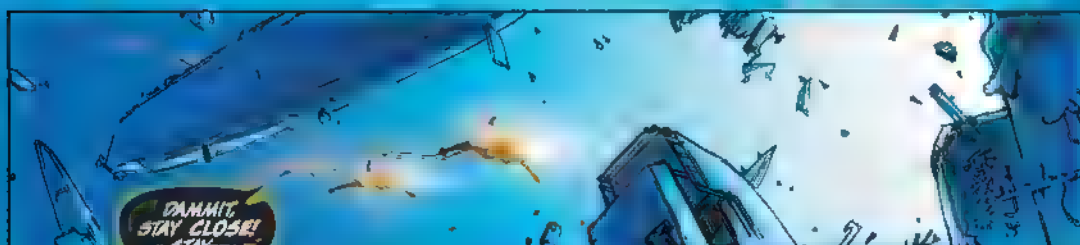
WE GOT CUT
OFF INSTRUMENTS
ARE SPINNING.
SOMETHING'S GOING
ON IN HERE...

LET'S MAKE
THIS QUICK,
BOYS.

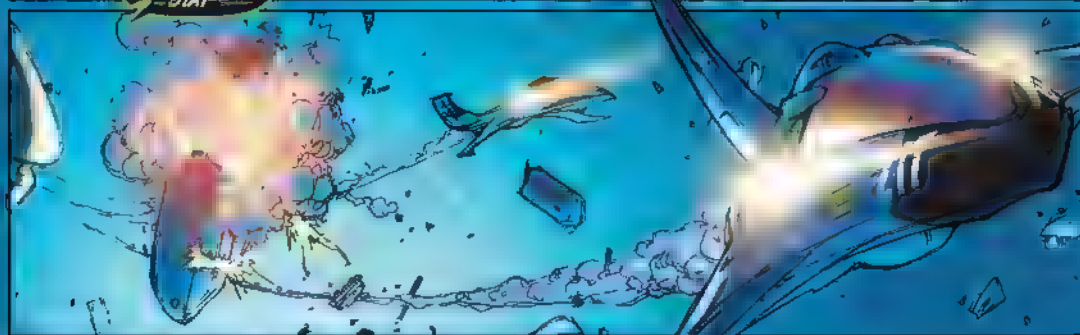
HUNDREDS
OF SHIPS MUST'VE
BEEN SWEEP INTO
THE LAKES WHEN
THEY...

JESUS,
JOKER. LOOK
AT ALL THOSE
BODIES.

WHAT THE
HELL DEBRIS IS
STARTING TO MOVE.
CURRENTS ARE
SHIFTING.



DAMMIT,
STAY CLOSER!
STAY!

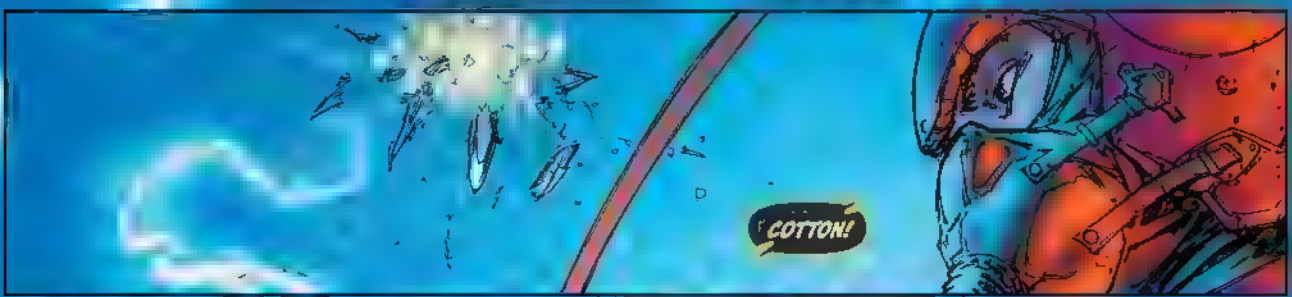




WE JUST
LOST BIG
BIRD!

I KNOW.

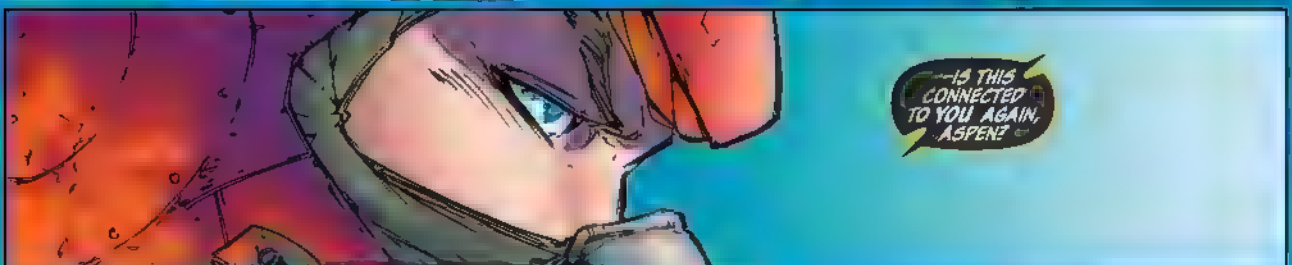
ABORT
NOW, COTTON.
HEAD FOR AIR!
HEAD FOR--



COTTON!



DAMMIT.
WHAT IS
THIS



IS THIS
CONNECTED
TO YOU AGAIN,
ASPEN?



IN, JOKER, DO
YOU READ

I'M HERE,
DAMMIT.

I'M STILL
HERE.

WHAT'S
HAPPENING?

WHY DID
YOU BRING ME
HERE?

WHO DID
THIS?

SHE WON'T STOP
ASKING *QUESTIONS*,
SENZEN.

I THINK I HAVE A
RIGHT, KIANI. YOU TOLD
ME I'D LEARN MORE ABOUT
MY *FATHER*. WHAT'S THIS
HAVE TO DO WITH--

THE LAKES RISING
ARE JUST THE *FIRST*
SIGN. THE BEGINNING OF
A *NEW AGE*.
ACCORDING TO *WHO*?

OUR... ANCESTORS.
THE BLACK. A RACE WE
SPAWNED FROM. A RACE
THAT LIVES WITHIN THE
DEEPEST OCEANS, WITHIN
DARKNESS.

IT HAS BEEN SO
LONG SINCE THEY
APPEARED... MANY BELIEVED
THEM TO BE NOTHING MORE
THAN A *MYTH*.

WHAT'S THIS
HAVE TO DO
WITH *ME*?

IT HAS NOTHING
TO DO WITH YOU. AT
LEAST NOT YET.

IT HAS TO
DO WITH YOUR
FATHER.

HOW DO
YOU--

IT IS *MY JOB*
TO KNOW, CHILD. IT IS
MY *BIRTHRIGHT*,
JUST AS YOURS--

--TO LEAD THIS WORLD
INTO THE *NEXT AGE*. WE WILL
TALK MORE... KIANI. COME.

DOES BRIGHT
EYES *KNOW* WHO
SHE'S TALKING
TO?

HEH.
SHE WILL.

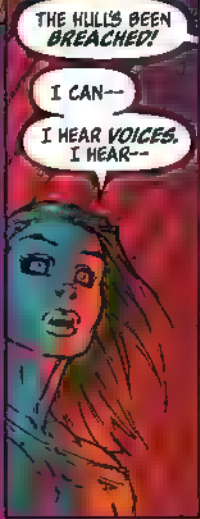
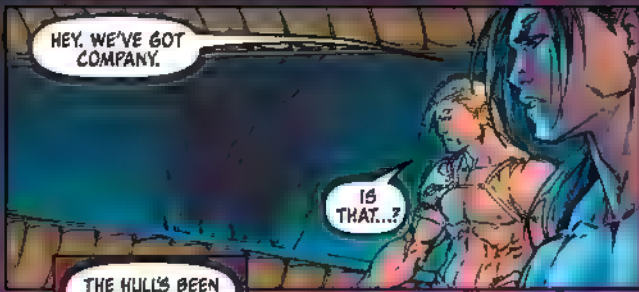
WHY DID YOU
BRING HER
HERE--?

TO KEEP THEM
AT BAY. YOU HAVE
TO TRUST ME.

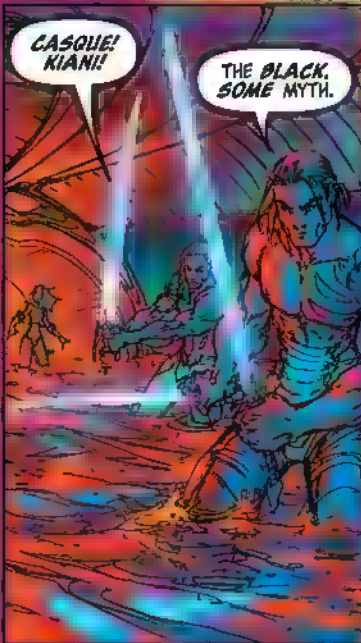
I DO.

YOU'RE THE
ONLY ONE I
TRUST.

LET'S
PREPARE
THE SHIP.

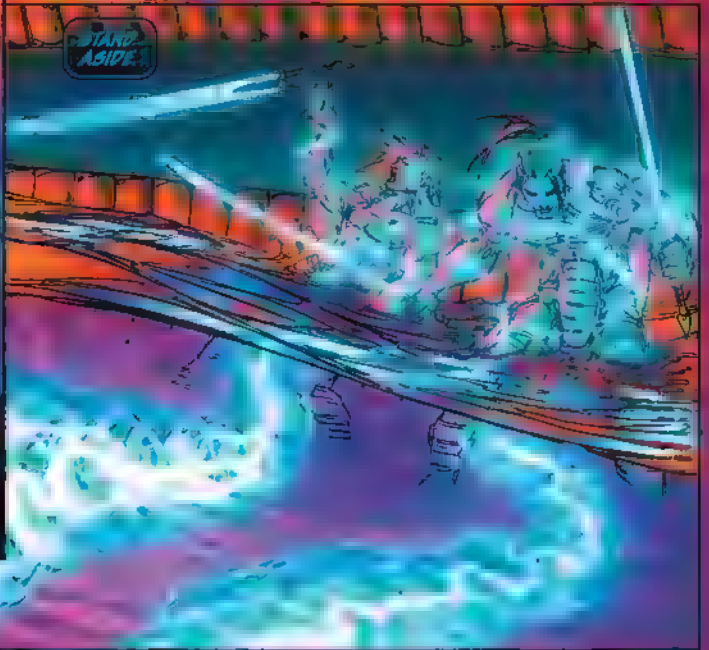


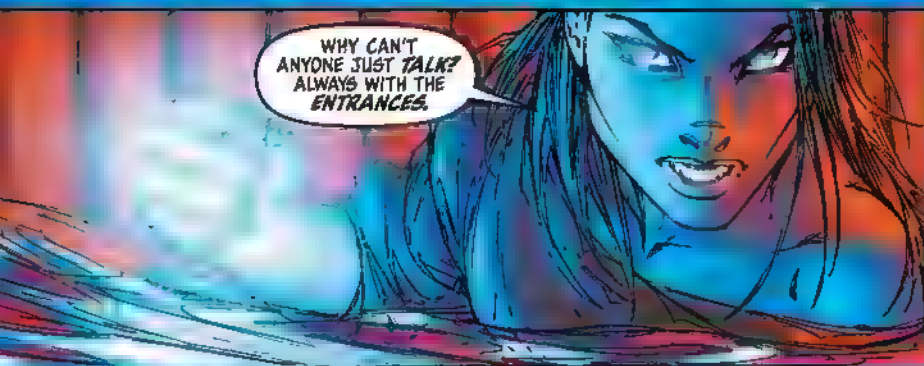
ASPEN.



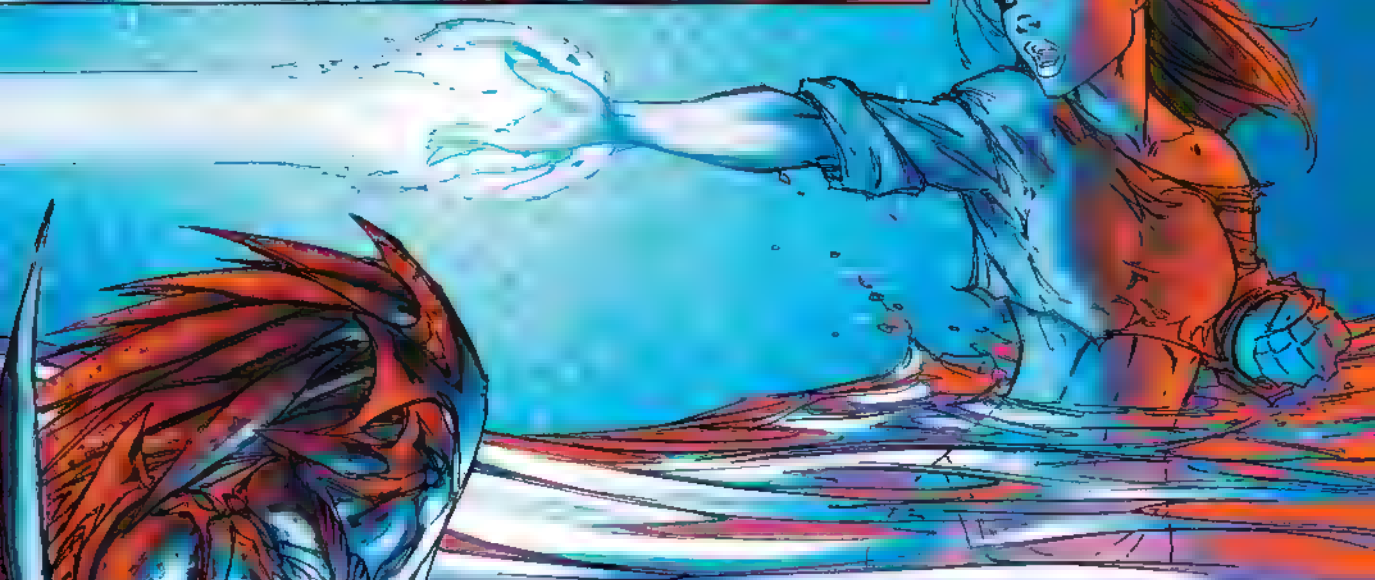
BROTHERS.

STAND ASIDE.





I'M TIRED OF IT!

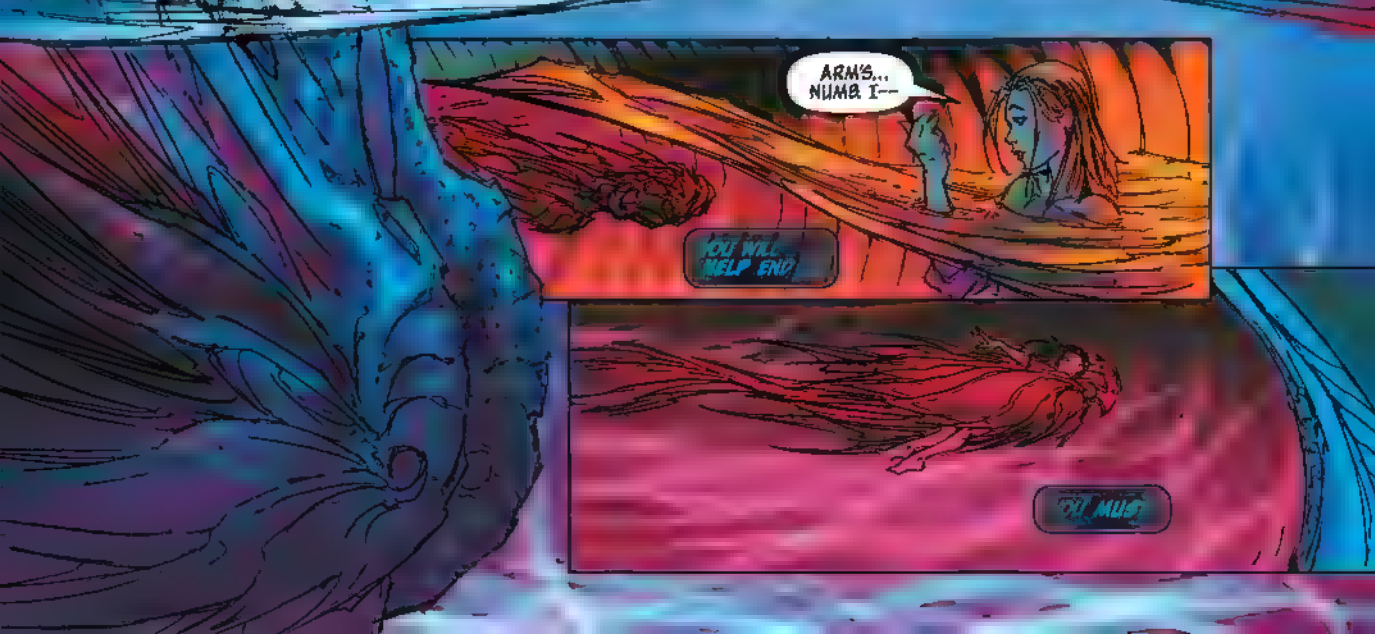


TIRED!

SHOULD NOT KNOW THE MEANING OF THE WORD.



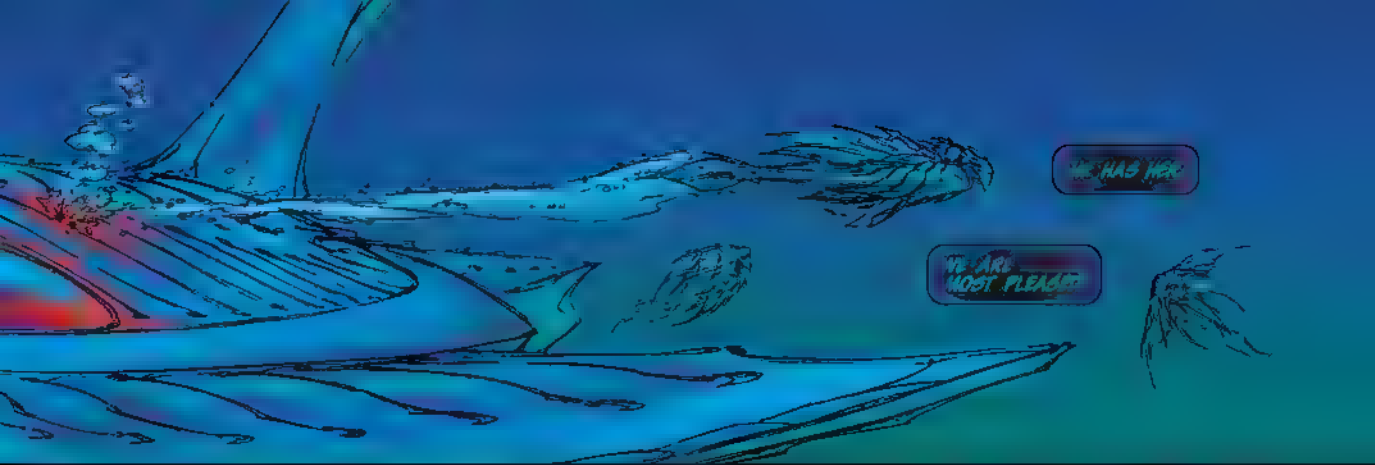
ARE TIRED OF BEING A WORLD ABUSER? ALTERED IT, WILL END.



ARMS... NUMB I--

YOU WILL HELP END.

YOU MUST.



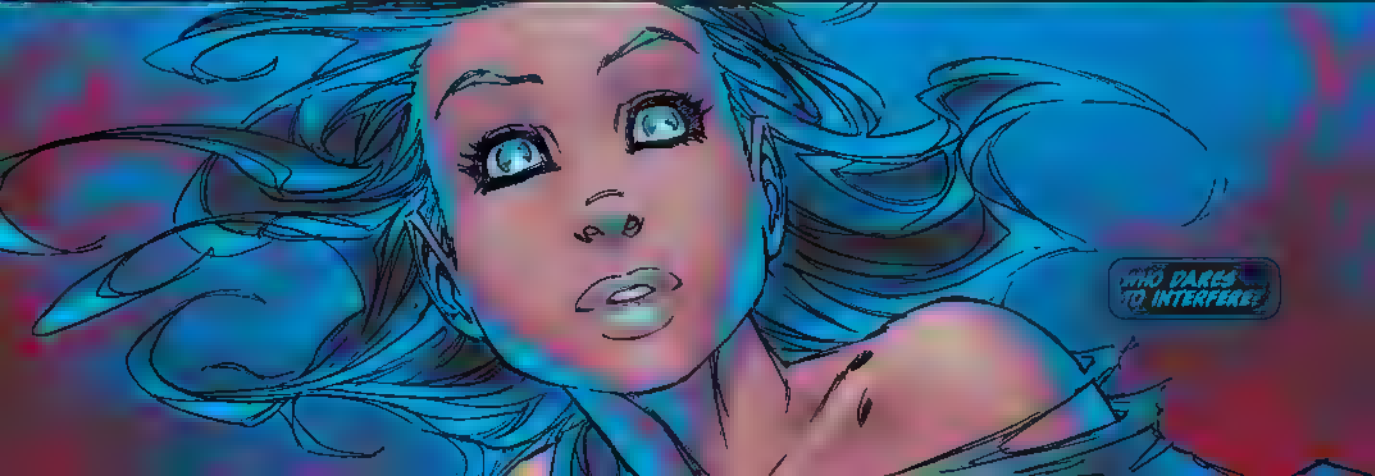
HE HAS HER

WE ARE MOST PLEASED



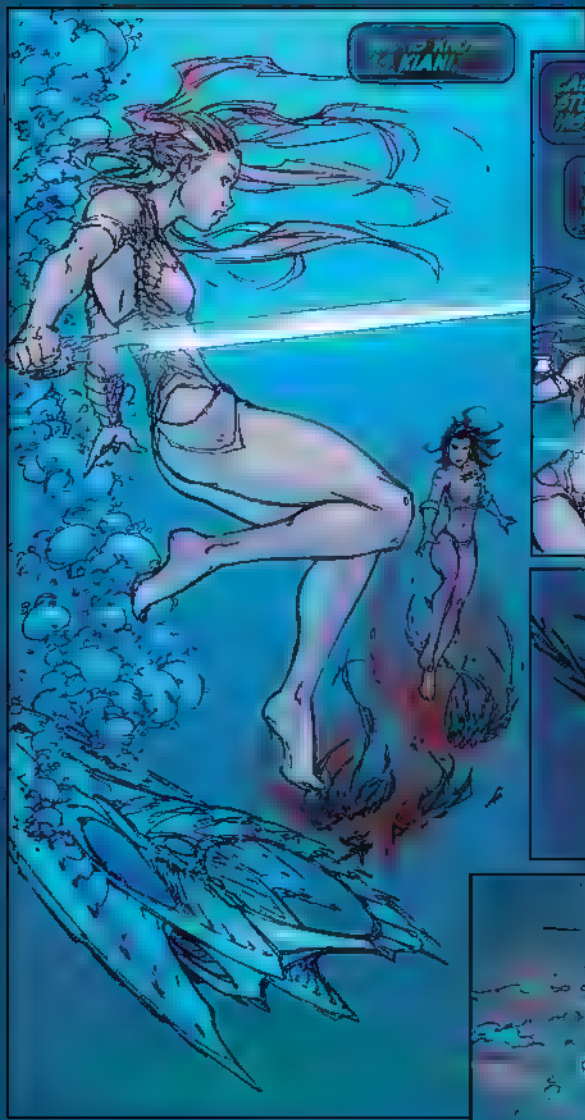
THEN THE RITUAL
MAY BEGIN

WOW



WHO DARES
TO INTERFERE?

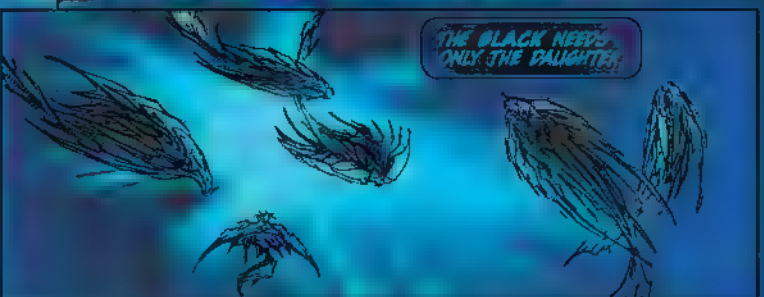
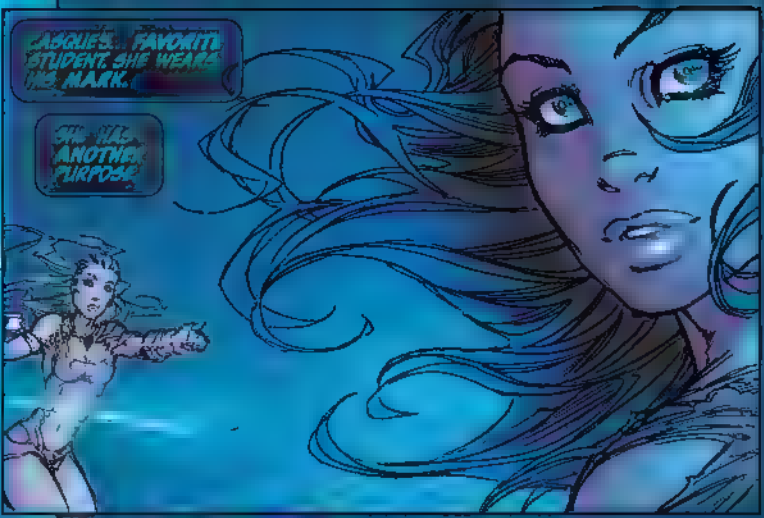




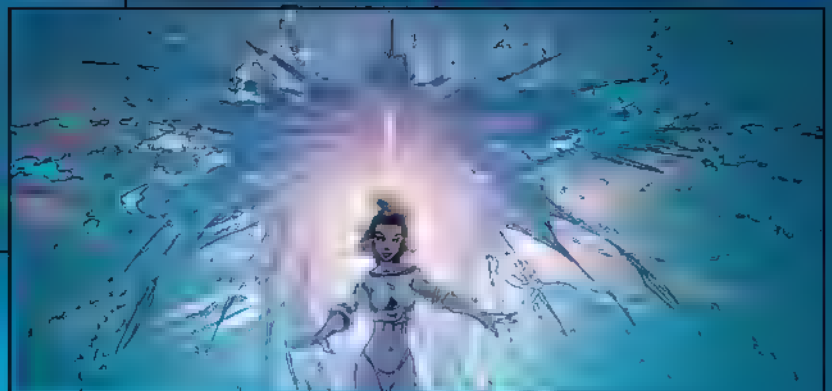
HE IS HERE

LAGQUEE, FAVORITE STUDENT SHE WEARS THE MARK

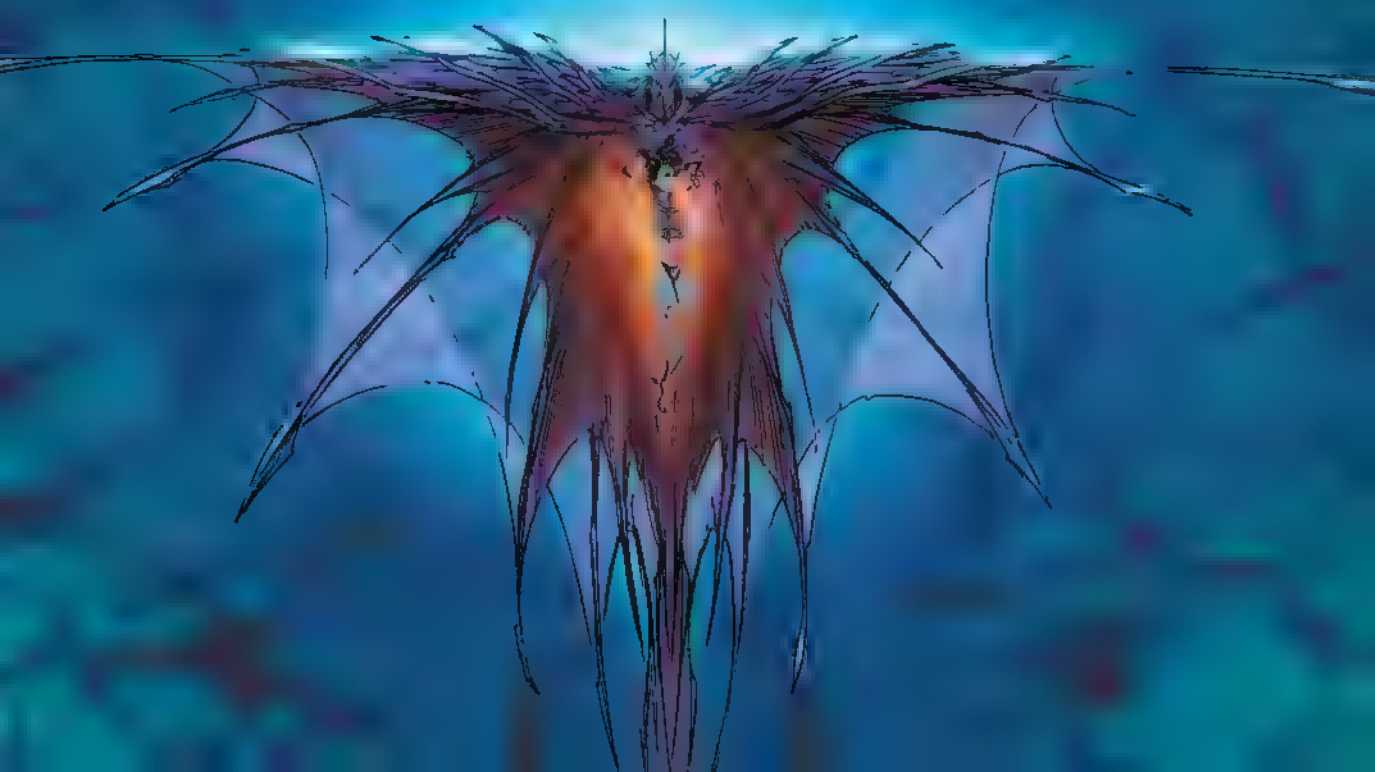
SHE HAS ANOTHER PURPOSE



THE BLACK NEEDS ONLY THE DAUGHTER



HE IS HERE



DO NOT BE
FRIGHTENED
YOUNG ONE

DO NOT
STRUGGLE

DO NOT
RENEGE

YOU WILL

EMBRACE



YIP

KEEP YOUR
LOINS TO

STAY OUT OF
OUR DESTINY

AND WE WILL STAY
OUT OF YOURS.



--THE LAST SEVERAL HOURS, THE LAKES HAVE CONTINUED TO FALL. THE NUMBER OF CASUALTIES IS STILL UNKNOWN, BUT ALREADY ESTIMATES IN THE THOUSANDS HAVE BEEN MADE.

THE WHITE HOUSE HAS YET TO RESPOND. THOUGH RELIGIOUS FIGURES THROUGHOUT THE NATION AND MUCH OF THE WORLD CONTINUE TO CITE PASSAGE AFTER PASSAGE, PREDICTING THE END OF THE WORLD.

OF COURSE, THE ONLY THING THAT CAN BE SAID WITH ANY SORT OF ASSURANCE--

--IS THAT OUR LIVES WILL NEVER BE THE SAME.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND. WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OF THAT?

TO FRIGHTEN US? TO MAKE A POINT?

WHAT VALUE DOES THAT GIRL HAVE?

THANKS FOR THE LIFT, CASQUE. YOU ALL RIGHT, SIPHON?

SKIN'S STILL COLD I CAN'T FEEL ANYTHING.

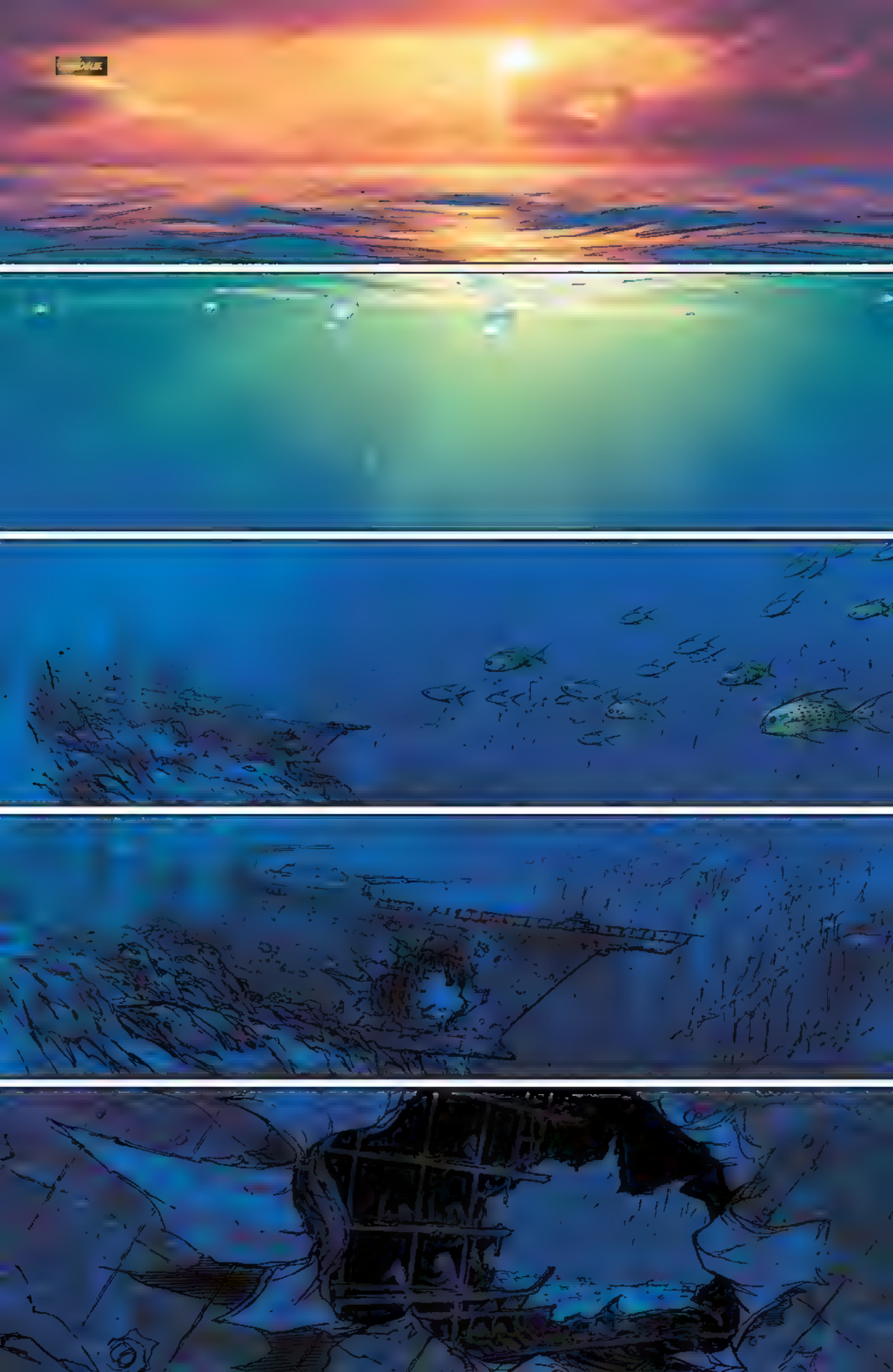
YOU ARE NOT YET READY TO UNDERSTAND KIANI.

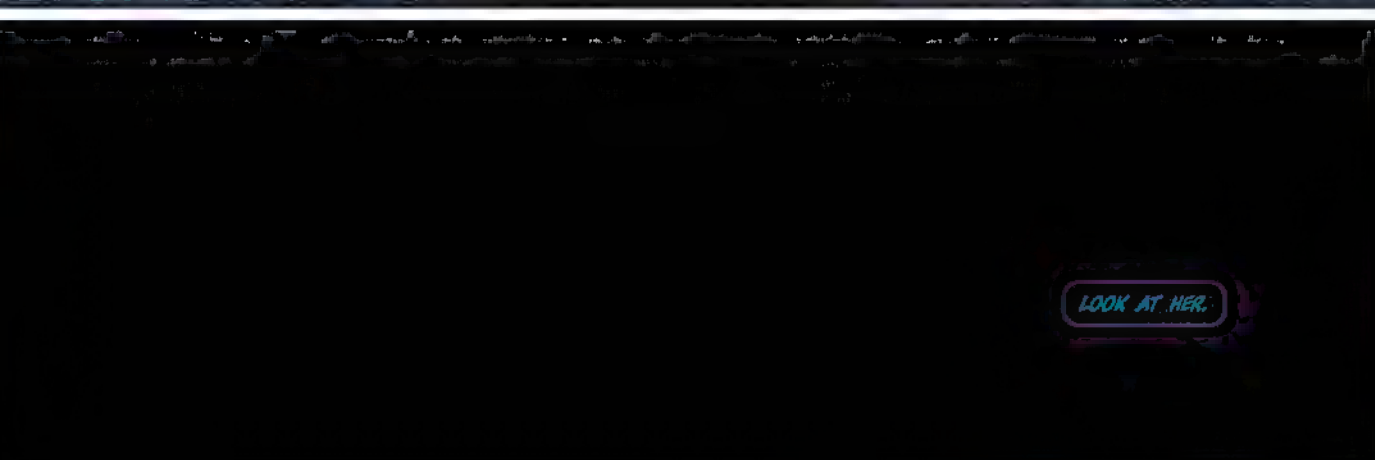
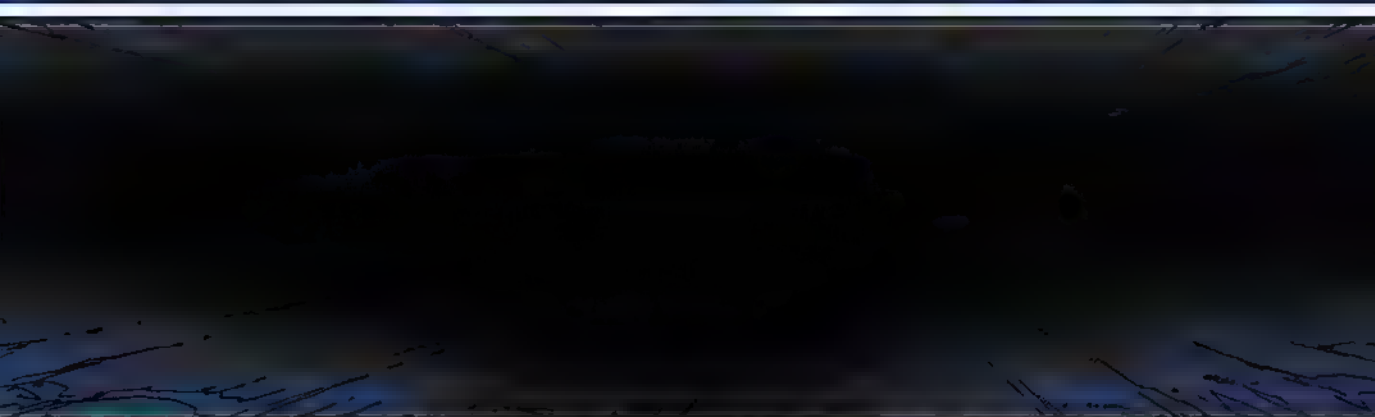
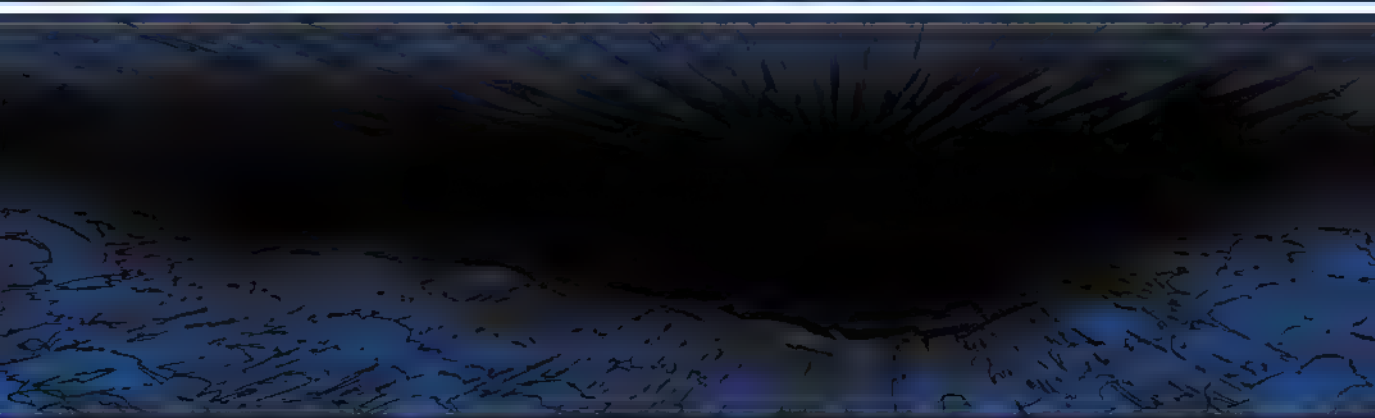
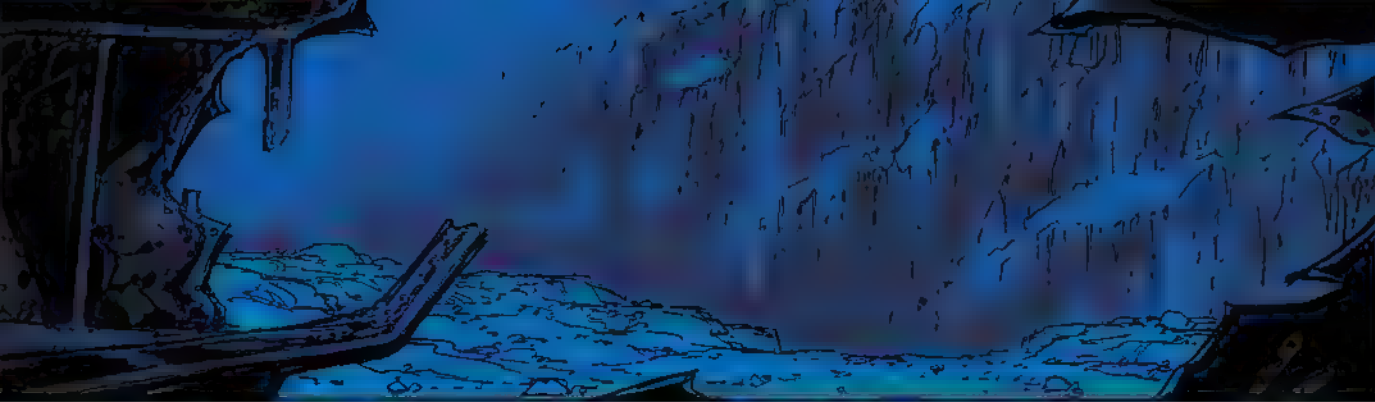
YOU'VE BEEN SAYING THE SAME THING TO ME, TO BRANDE, AND SIPHON SINCE WE WERE CHILDREN.

WHEN WILL YOU TELL US OUR PURPOSE?

SOON.

MUCH TOO SOON.





SHE HAS BEEN
AWAY TOO LONG.

SHE HAS ALREADY
CHANGED.

THE SURFACE
POISONED HER.

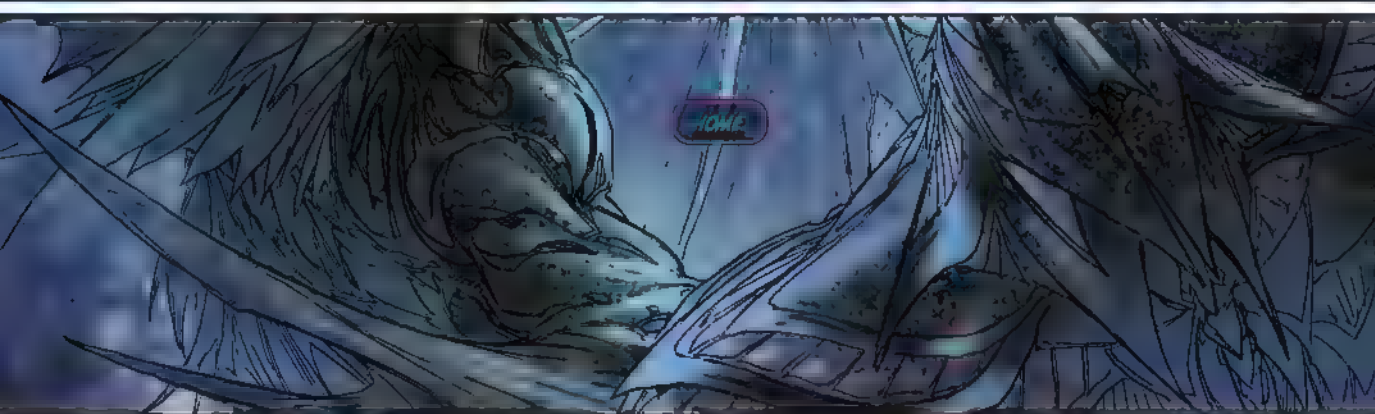
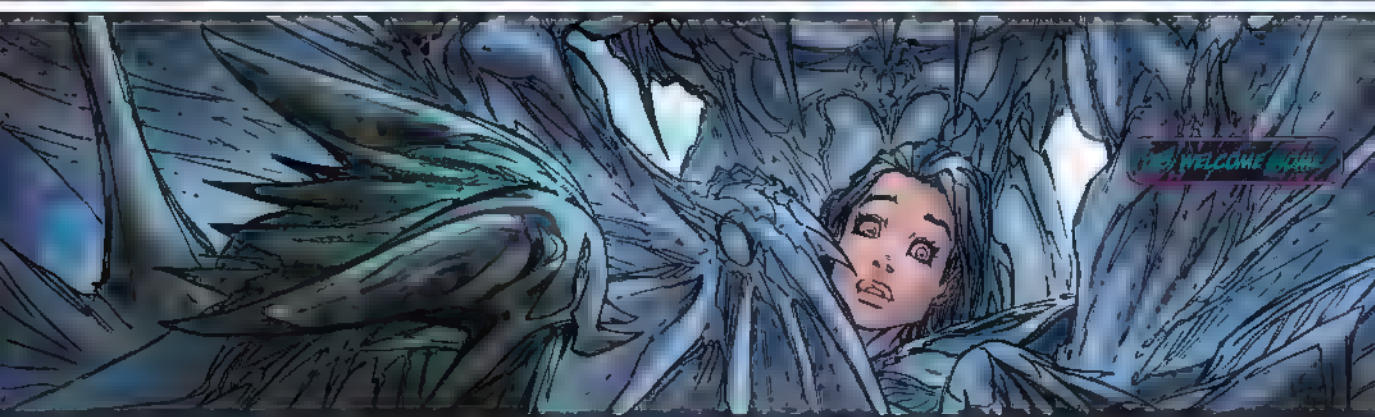
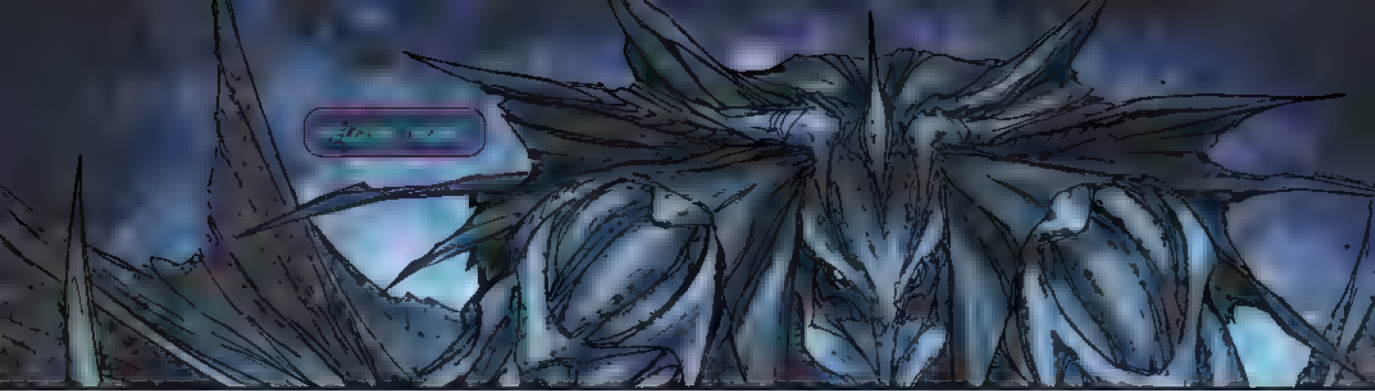
IT POISONS US ALL.
IT'S ALWAYS N.A.S.

SHE NEEDS
RECONDITIONING.

RECON.

ALREADY
BEGINNING.

CHILD.





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ASPEN
SEASONS
SPRING 2005
CHAPTER ONE
MICHAEL TURNER'S
FATHOM



Once I caught a squid
WRITTEN BY: J.T. KRUI high
PENCILED BY: KOI TURNBULL
INKED BY: JASON GORDER
COLORED BY: CHRISTINA STRAIN

THIS WAY. IT'S
A SHORTCUT.

PETER, WAIT
UP. YOU SAID I
COULD COME
THIS TIME.

I SAID YOU
COULD TAG ALONG,
BUT I NEVER SAID
ANYTHING ABOUT WAITING
UP FOR YOU. YOU'D JUST
BETTER HOPE THEY DON'T
RUN OUT OF BOOGIE
BOARDS TO RENT

YO, PETE,
WHO'S THE
MIGHTY--
MITE?

IT'S MY KID
BROTHER. HE'S BEEN
NAGGING ME FOR MONTHS TO
BRING HIM ALONG. FIGURED I
MIGHT AS WELL GET IT OVER
WITH. JUST IGNORE HIM.
THAT'S WHAT I DO.

YOU SNOOZE,
YOU LOSE.

DUDE,
CHECK IT
OUT...

WAIT
FOR ME!

YO, CAPTAIN
NEMO, WHAT'S THE
MATTER? AFRAID OF
THE WATER?

CAN'T GO IN
THERE... SIMPLY
CAN'T GO IN THERE.
DON'T LIKE THE
WATER...

CAPTAIN?
CAPTAIN?



AH-HA! YES, YES!
I AM A CAPTAIN.
BAHA IS MY NAME, AND,
I'VE BEEN ON A MOST
FANTASTIC ADVENTURE.
MONTHS AND MONTHS AND
MONTHS, I WAS OUT TO
SEA. DEEP, DEEP IN THE
DARKEST DEPTHS OF
THE OCEANS.

SOUNDS
PRETTY DEEP?
COME ON GUYS,
LET'S GO.

IT WAS! IT
WAS, I SAY!

IT WAS A REGION OF THE OCEAN
THAT HADN'T ENJOYED THE LIGHT
OF DAY FOR MORE THAN 10,000
YEARS. EVEN THE LIGHTS FROM MY
SPELUNKER WERE ONLY CAPABLE OF
CUTTING OUT A WEE LITTLE HOLE IN
THE SURROUNDING DARKNESS.

"IT WAS THEN THAT I FIRST
CAME FACE-TO-FACE WITH
THE LARGEST SQUID I HAD
EVER LAID EYES ON."



"THE GRIMY TENTICA."

"SQUIDS ARE USUALLY
KNOWN FOR HAVING AN
AGGRESSIVE NATURE, BUT, THIS
ONE WAS A RIGHT MEAN ONE."

"UNLIKE THE
SQUID, THE GRIMY TENTICA HAS
MULTIPLE SETS OF TENTACLES.
NO DOUBT AN ADAPTATION IN
ORDER TO MAKE QUICKER WORK
OF THE THICK SKIN OF ITS PREY."

"IF I HADN'T STOPPED TO CONTINUE
GNAWING AWAY, THE SPELLINKER
WOULD BE HISTORY. AND I MOST
LIKELY WOULD HAVE SEEN THE
CHEWY CENTIN SURPRISE FOR THIS
GLASSY MOLLUSK."

"WELL,
BE SURE AND TAKE
TRAVELS UNHAPPY
FOR ANYTHING."

"THE SPELLINKER'S SHELL
HAS THE STRENGTH OF STEEL,
TOO THICK TO CUT THROUGH,
BUT I THOUGHT A WELL-PLACED
TAP MIGHT DO THE TRICK."

"WITH THIS TEMPORARY COMMISSION,
IT WAS TIME FOR ME TO TAKE MY
LEAVE. BUT I DON'T KNOW WHEN I
WOULD GET ANOTHER LOOK AT
SUCH A MAGNIFICENT SPECIMEN."

"I HOPED TO
TAKE A GOODNIGHT."

"BUT I WOULD
STILL HAVE HAD
TENTACLES LEFT."

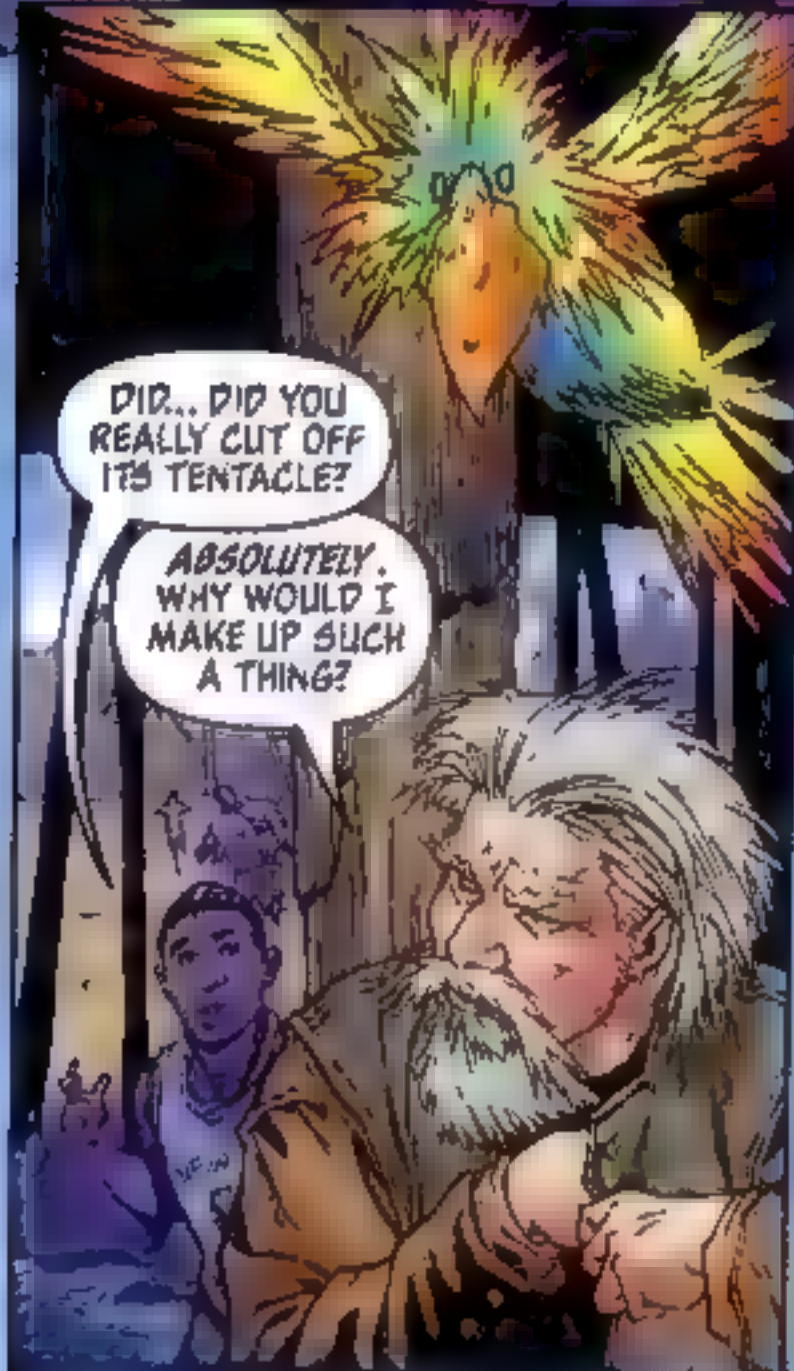


EWWWW.
GROSS.

WOW...

WELL, GREAT
STORY CAPTAIN,
BUT, WE GOT
SURFING TO DO.

WHAT
A TOTAL WASTE!
LET'S ROLL...



DID... DID YOU
REALLY CUT OFF
ITS TENTACLE?

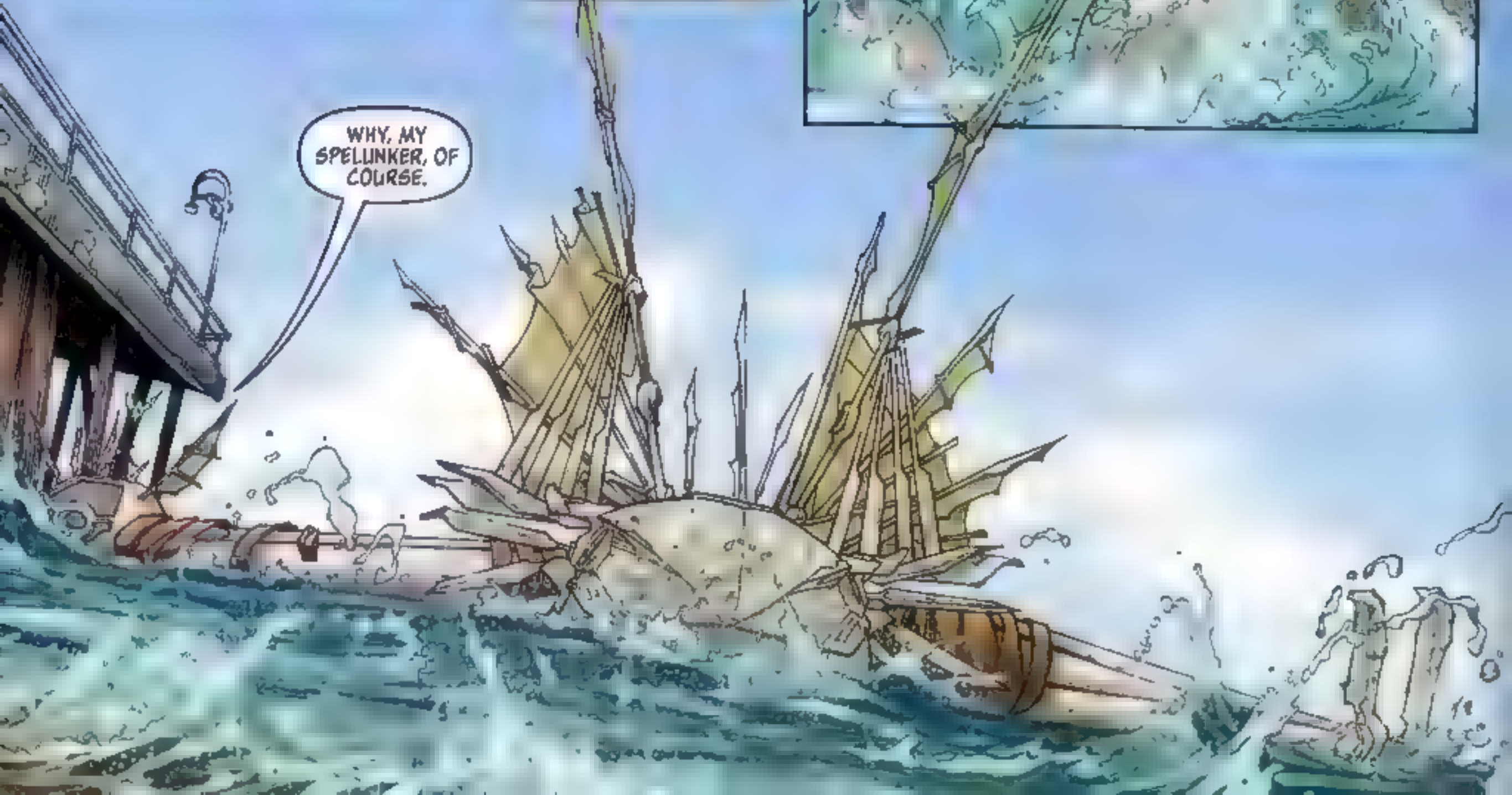
ABSOLUTELY.
WHY WOULD I
MAKE UP SUCH
A THING?



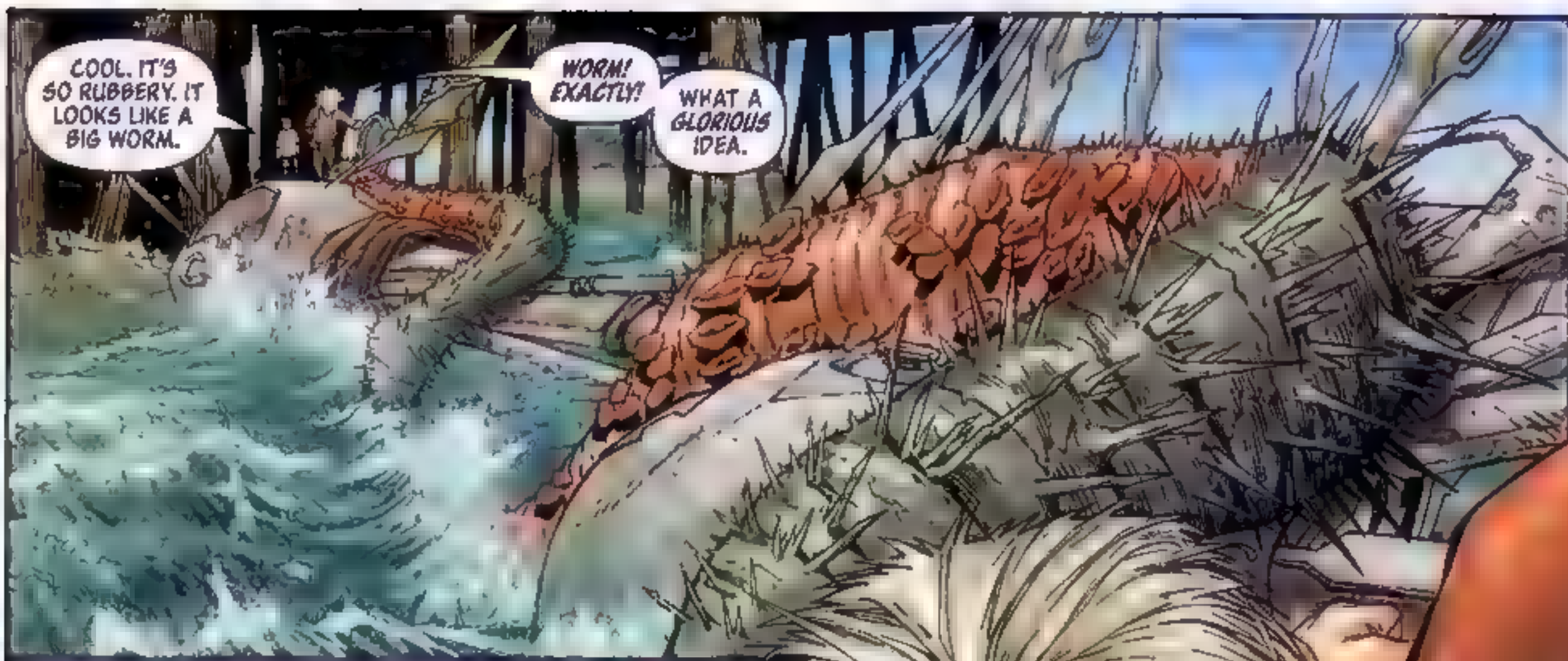
HERE... I'LL
SHOW YOU.



HUH? WHAT
IS THAT?



WHY, MY
SPELINKER, OF
COURSE.



COOL. IT'S
SO RUBBERY. IT
LOOKS LIKE A
BIG WORM.

WORM!
EXACTLY!

WHAT A
GLORIOUS
IDEA.

I AM IN
DESPERATE NEED
OF ADEQUATE BAIT
FOR GOING AFTER
BIG MOE.

BIG MOE?
WHO IS BIG
MOE?

WHO IS BIG MOE? AH,
A MARVELOUS QUESTION,
INDEED. HE'S THE BIGGEST
CREATURE I EVER SAW IN
ALL THE WORLD.

LET ME TELL
YOU AN EVEN BETTER
STORY. IT'S ABOUT THE
TIME I ALMOST CAUGHT
HIM, WITH THE HELP OF A
VERY SPECIAL GIRL...

LOON!



ASPEN
SEASONS
SPRING 2005
CHAPTER TWO
FANTASY
CANNON



The Sweet
DETAILS
WRITTEN BY: J.T. KRUL
PENCILED BY: MARCUS TO
INKED BY: JASON GORDER
COLORED BY: PETER STEIGERWALD
SEPARATED BY: DAVID MORAN

PACIFIC

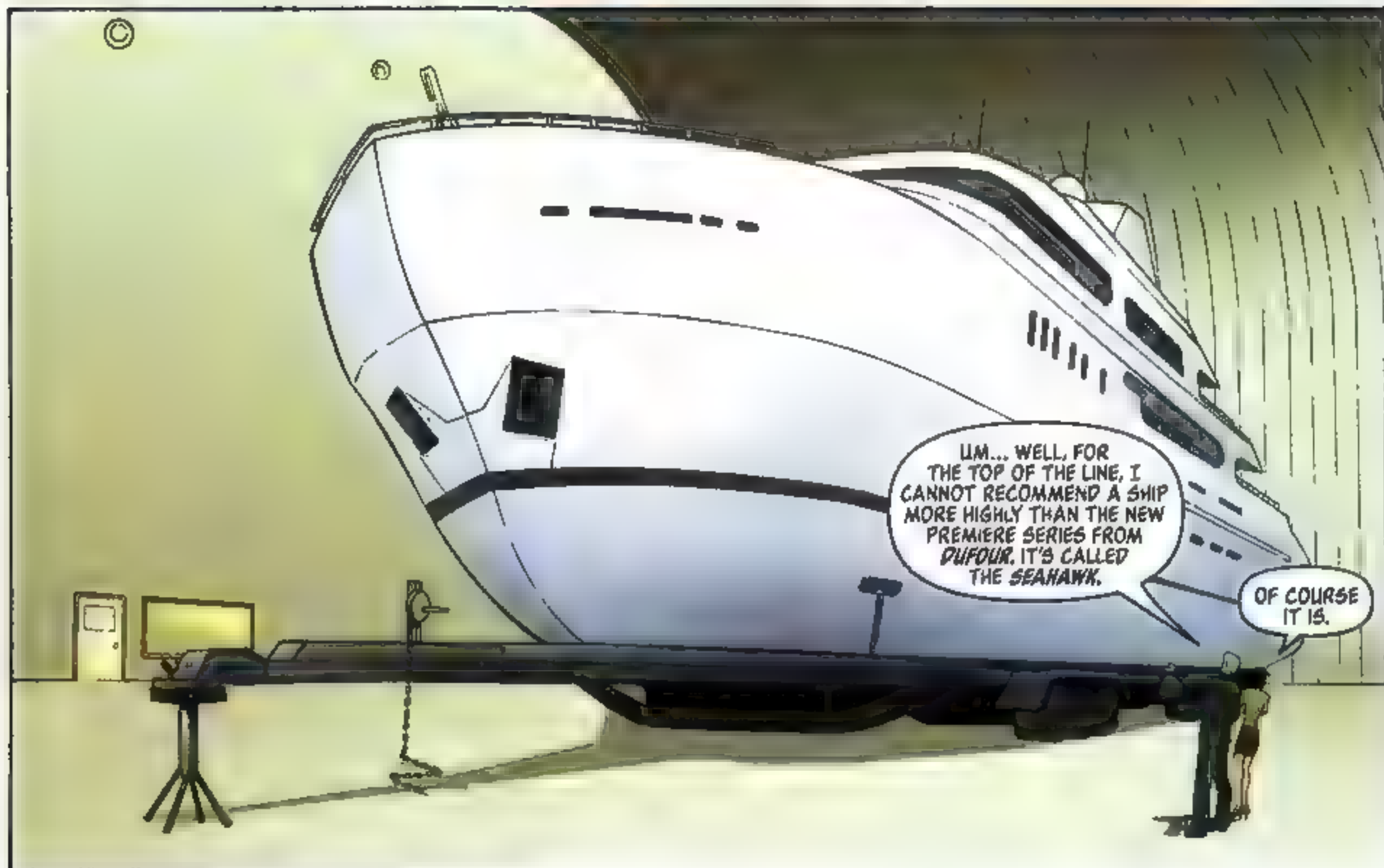
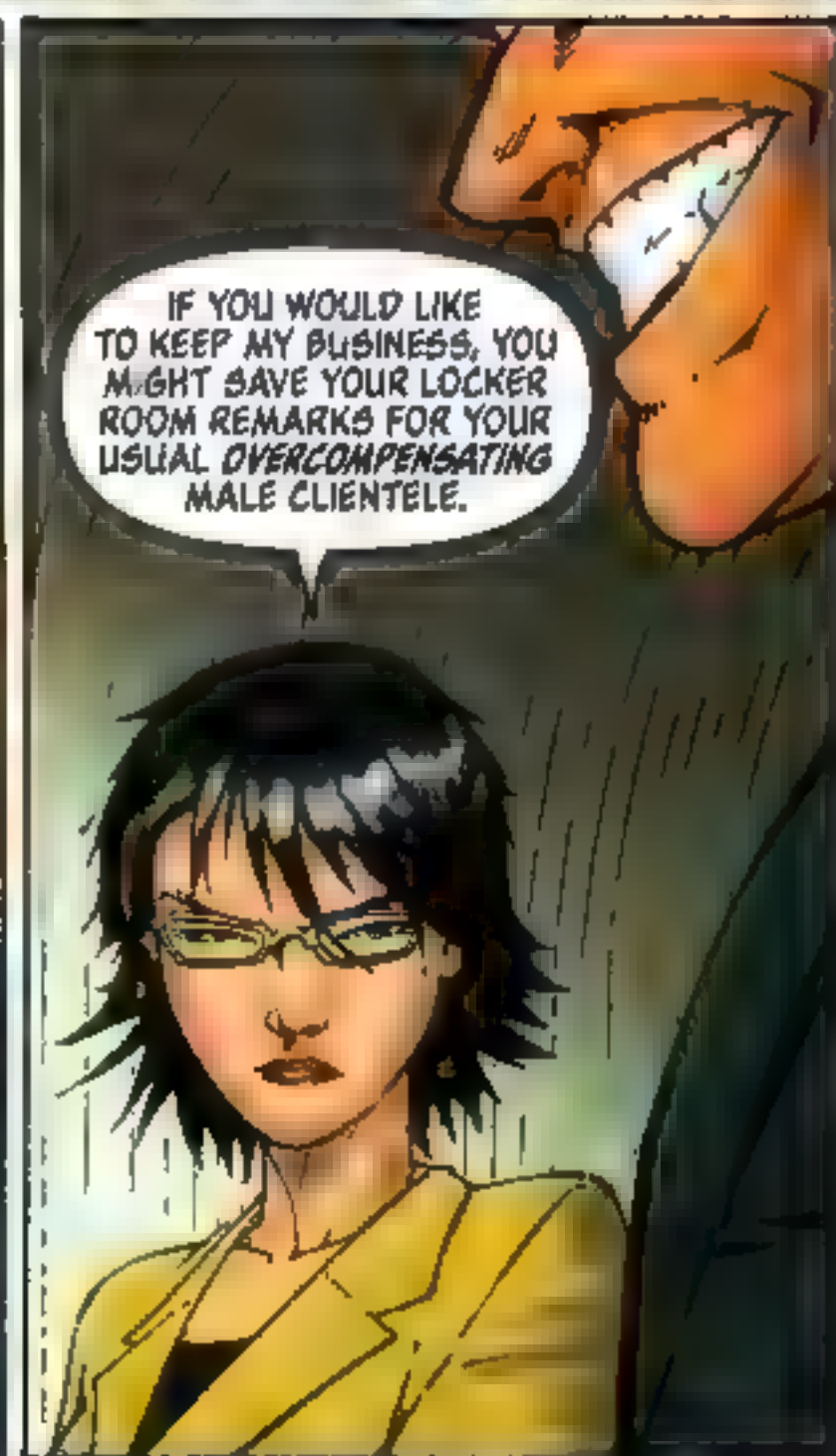
HIS NAME IS
CANNON HAWKE.

HE HEADS HUNTERMAN THINK-
TANK THAT SPECIALIZES IN
INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS AND
GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS.

AND WHILE HE DOES NOT
ORIGINATE FROM EITHER COUNTRY,
HIS MAIN FOCUS OF OPERATION IS
THE UNITED STATES AND JAPAN.

WITH HIS MIND CONSTANTLY
LOCKED ON IMPORTANT
ISSUES, HE DOESN'T LIKE TO
WASTE HIS TIME DEALING
WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD.







GOOD AFTERNOON MISS. HOW MAY I BE OF ASSISTANCE?

MY NAME IS AKIKO NIGATA, I PHONED YOU EARLIER.

AH YES, MS. NIGATA. I'VE BEEN EXPECTING YOU.

LIKE I SAID ON THE PHONE, I'M AFRAID I CANNOT HELP YOU WITH THE '91 MATTEO. AS YOU MAY BE AWARE, MOST OF THAT VINTAGE WAS A VICTIM OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR. QUITE FRANKLY, I AM ENVIIOUS OF YOUR EMPLOYER IF HE HAS BEEN ABLE TO SAMPLE IT AT ALL.

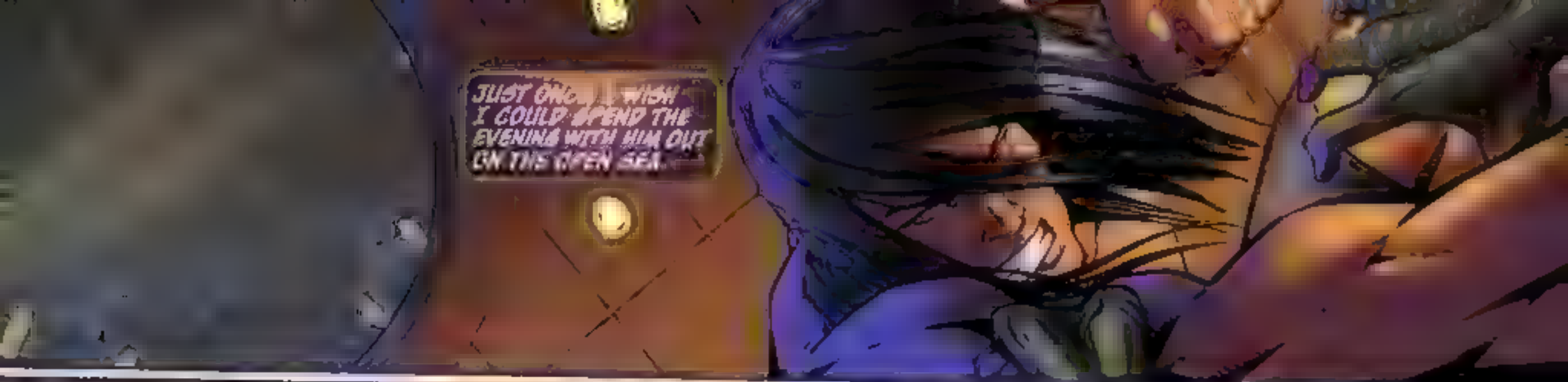


BUT, I AM CONFIDENT THAT I WILL BE ABLE TO FIND SOMETHING TO SATISFY HIS PALATE.



I FEEL THIS BARDOLINO IS TRYING A LITTLE TOO HARD TO BE DRY. BUT, THE OAK FINESSE IS HEADING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION. PERHAPS WE SHOULD MOVE TOWARD SOMETHING WITH A TAD MORE BODY.

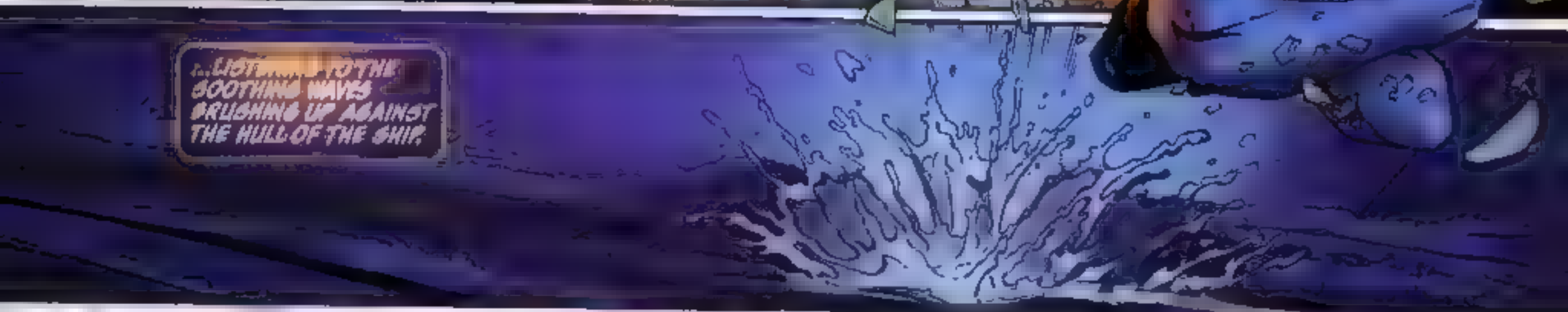
I HAVE '57 LA VERGNE THAT YOU MUST TRY. THE GRAPES ARE SWEETENED BY BOTRYTIS CINEREA, A MOLD THAT IS ACTUALLY BENEFICIAL IN ENHANCING THE RICHNESS OF THE WINE.



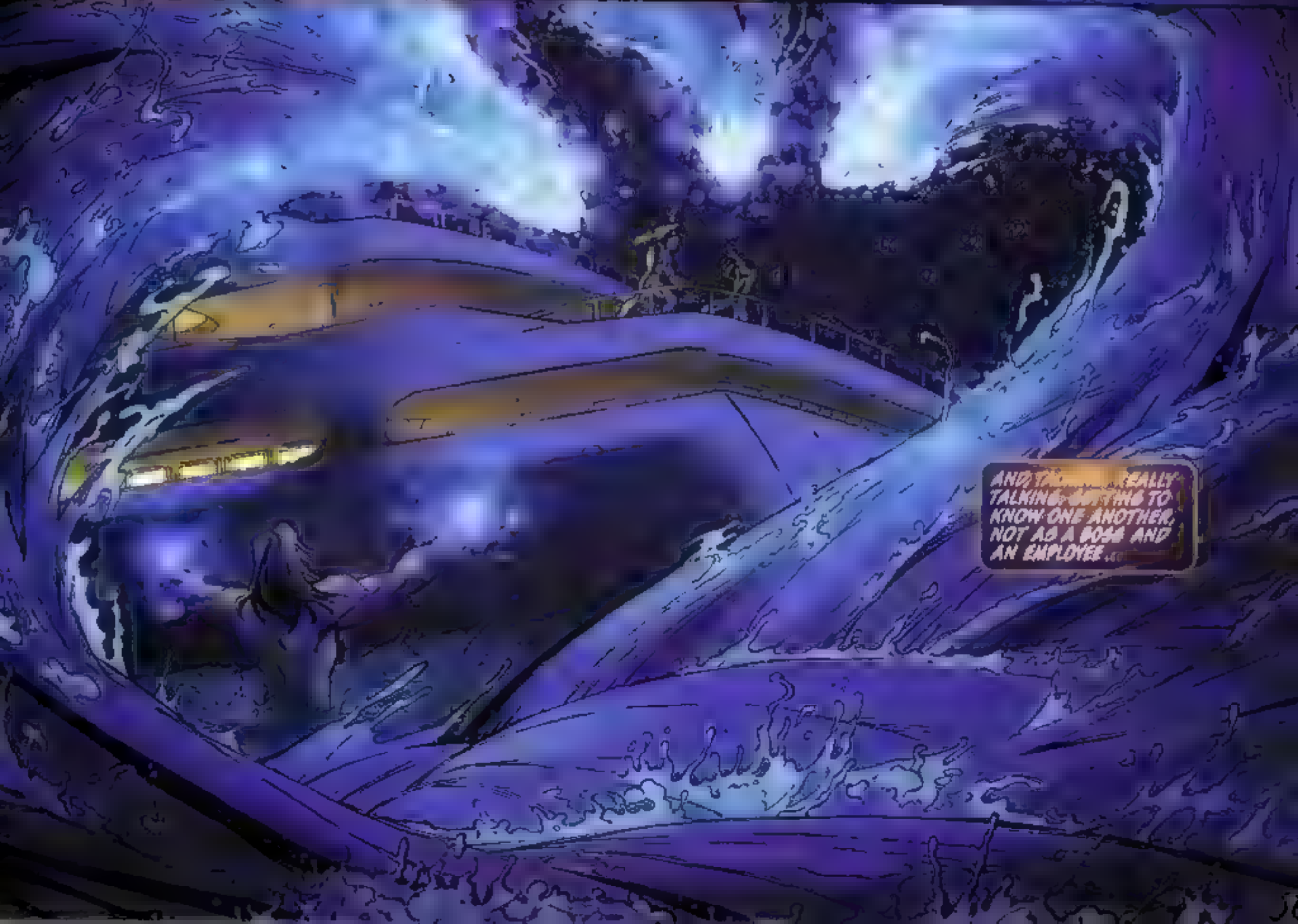
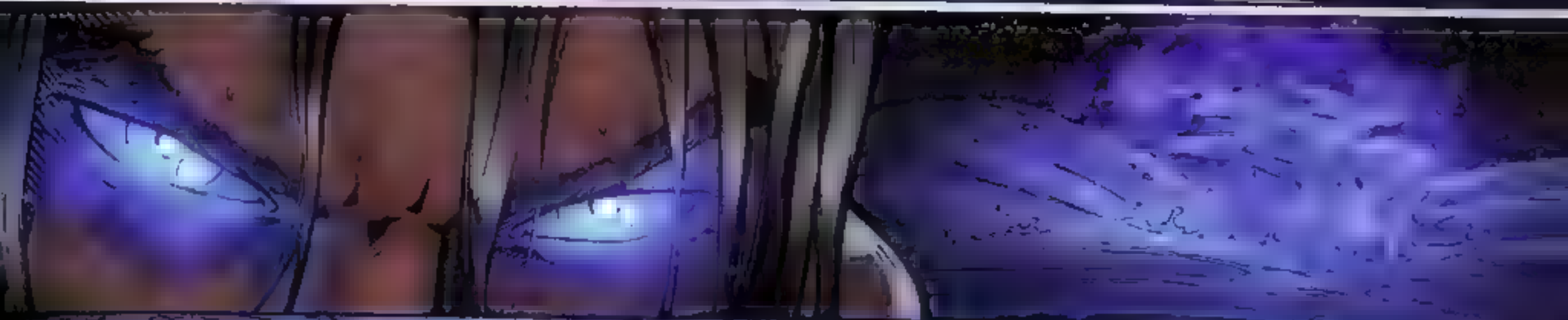
JUST ONCE I WISH
I COULD SPEND THE
EVENING WITH HIM OUT
ON THE OPEN SEA.



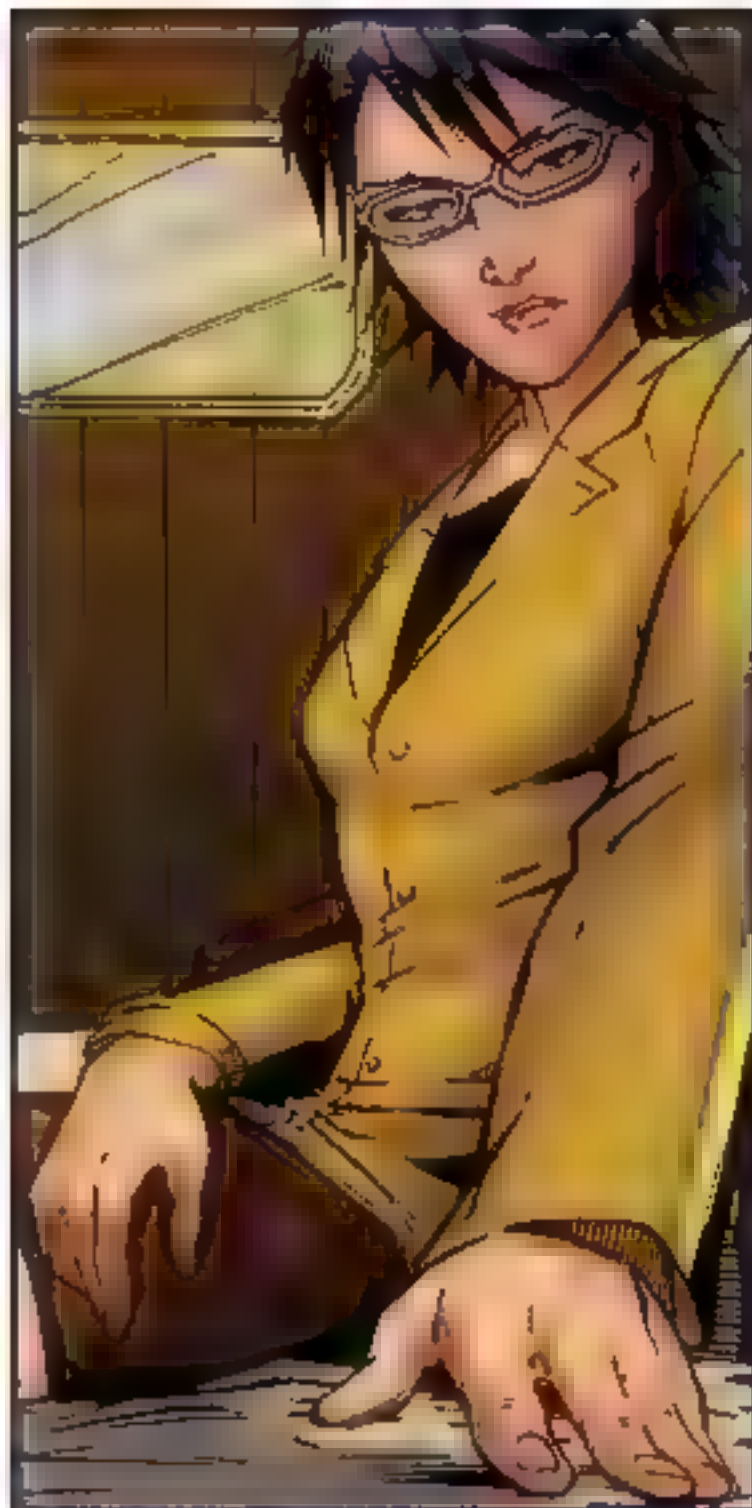
IT WOULD BE
SO PEACEFUL.



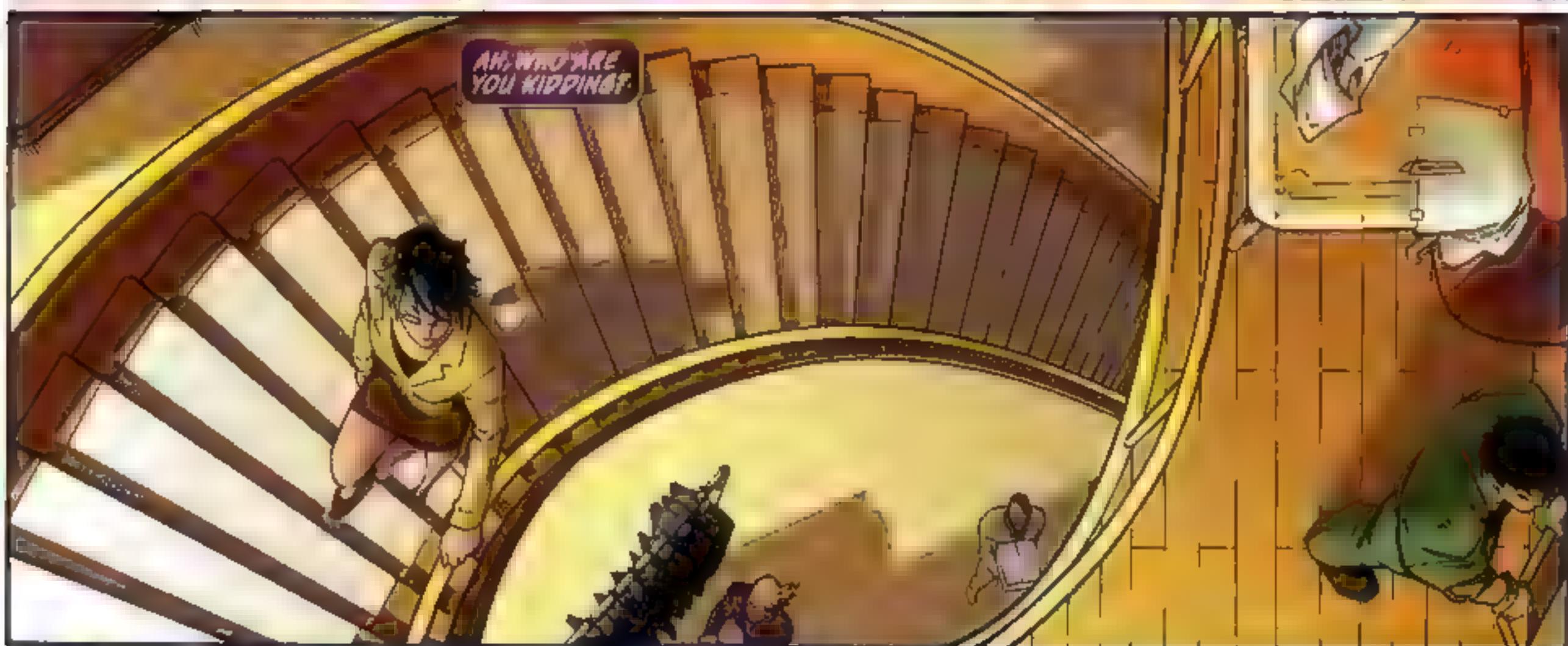
I... LISTEN TO THE
SOOTHING WAVES
BRUSHING UP AGAINST
THE HULL OF THE SHIP.



AND THEN I REALLY
TALKING, GETTING TO
KNOW ONE ANOTHER,
NOT AS A BOSS AND
AN EMPLOYEE.



BUT AS A MAN
AND A WOMAN.

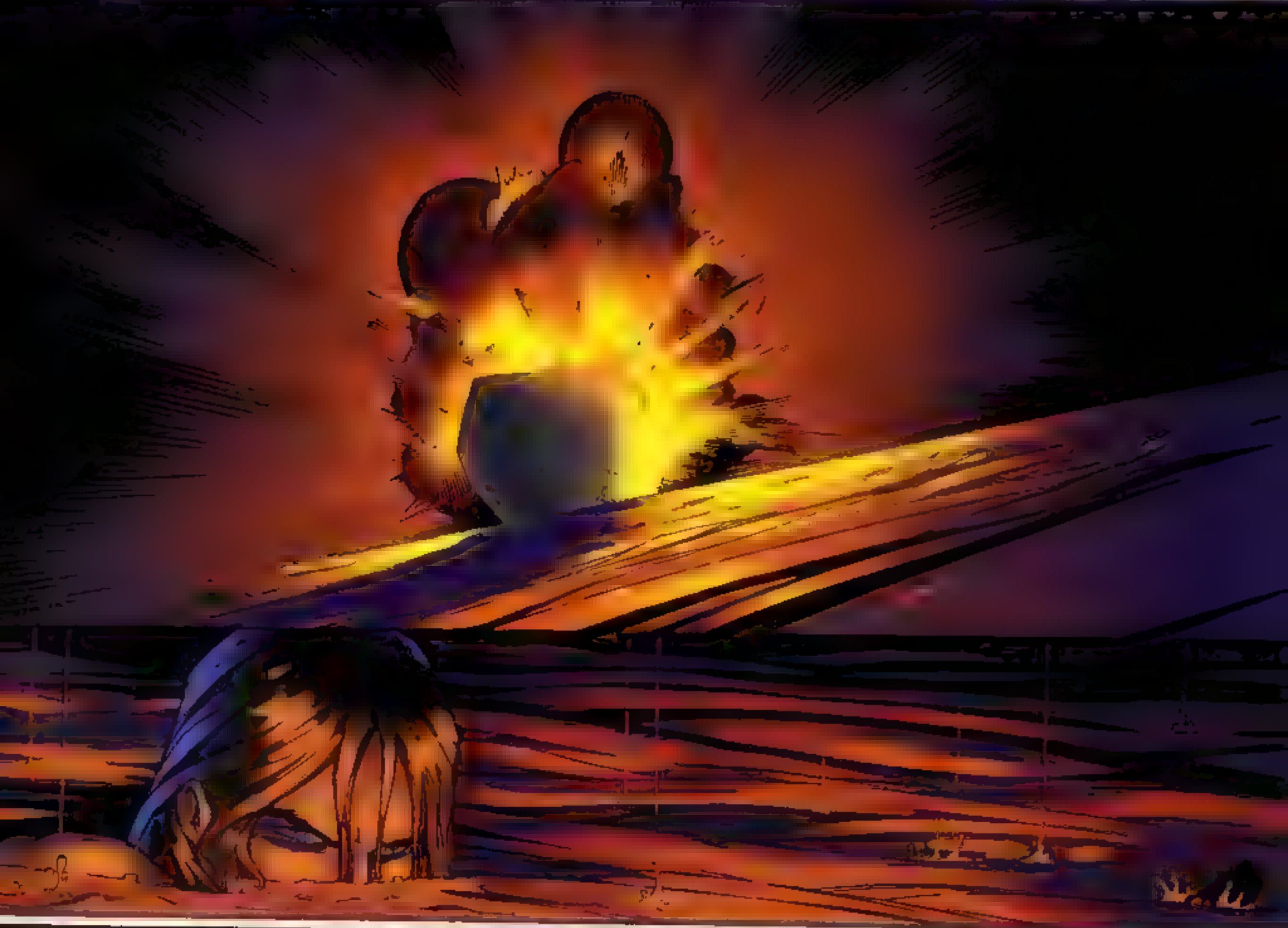
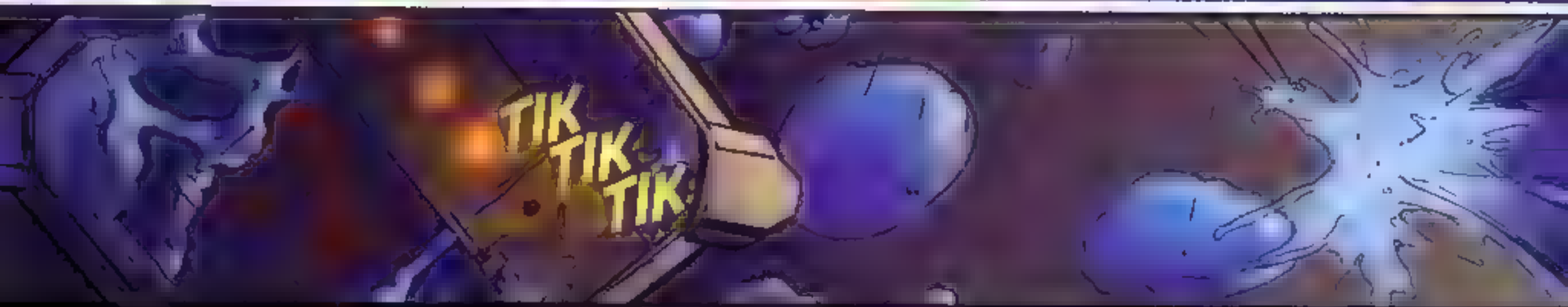


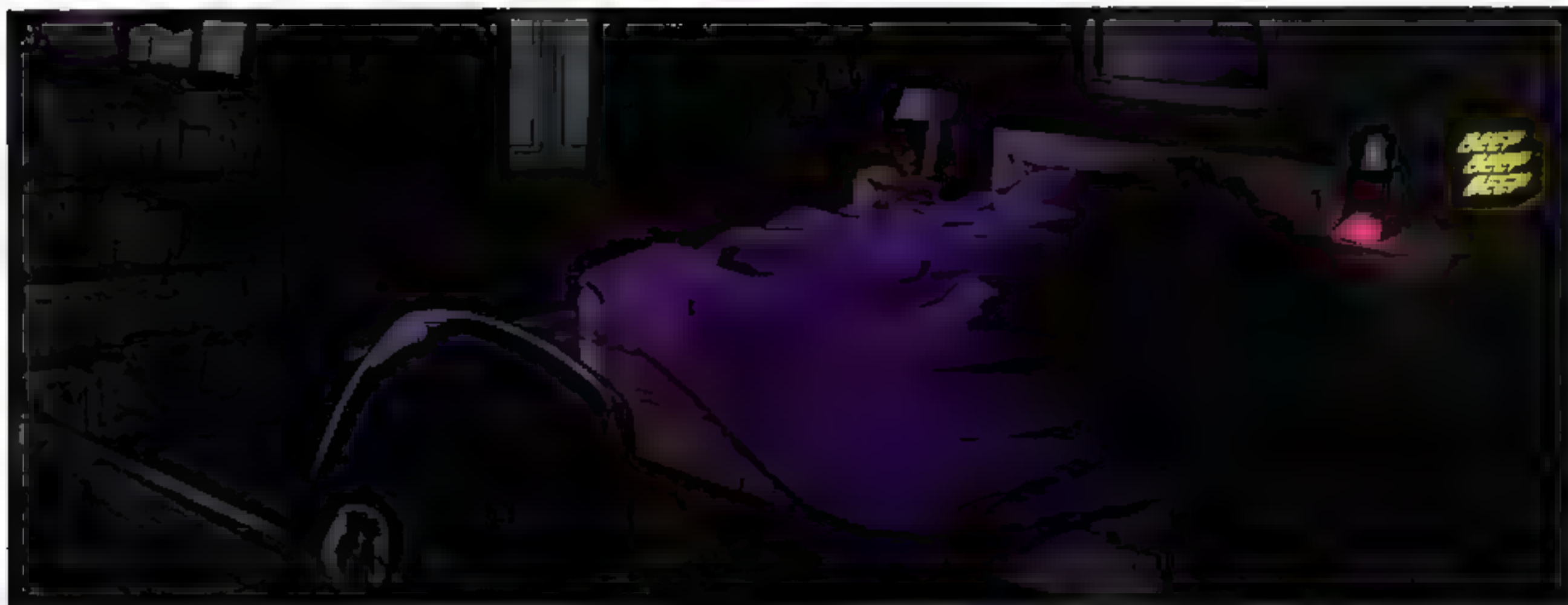
AH, WHO ARE
YOU KIDDING?



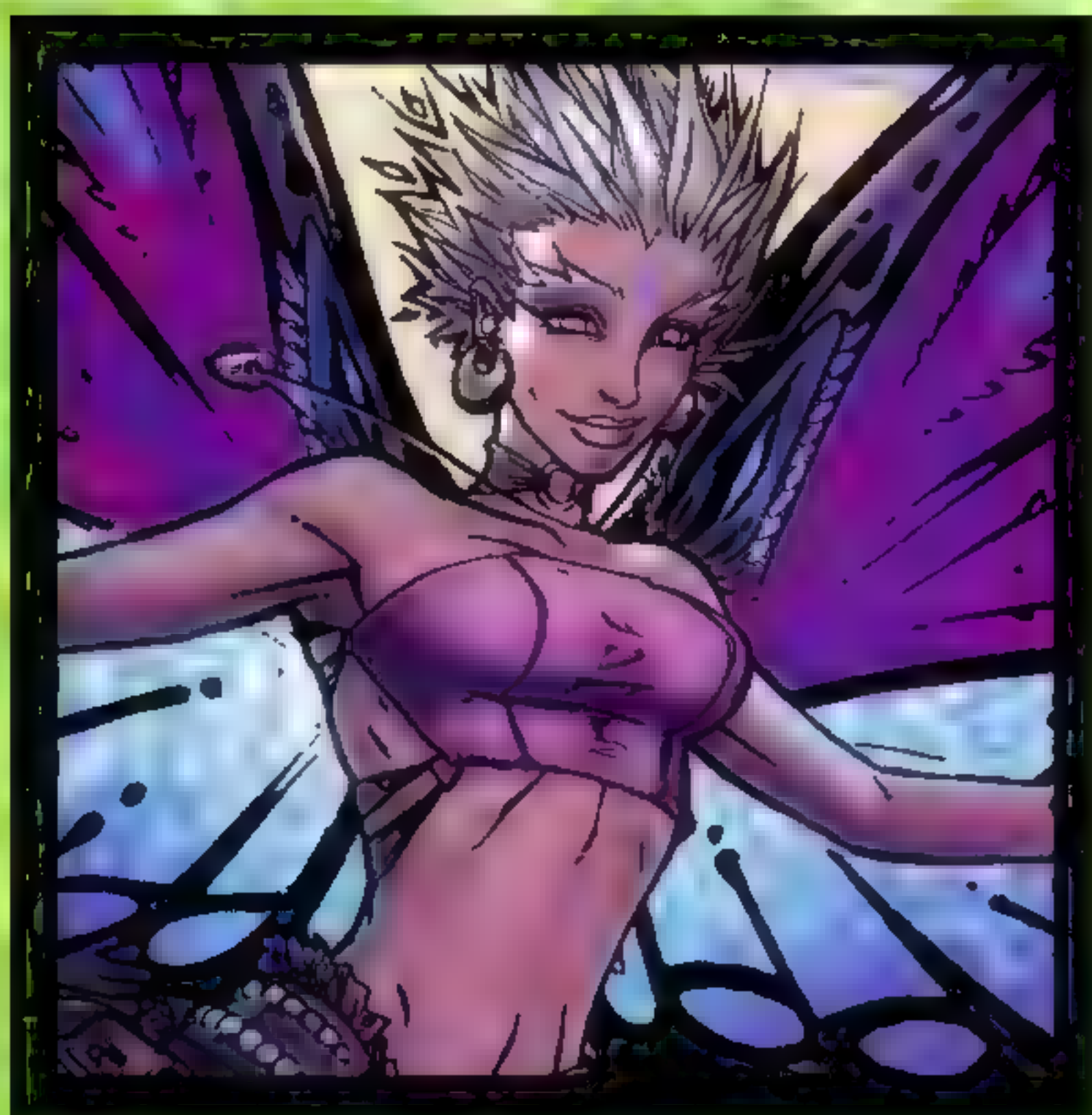
YOU PROBABLY JUST DESCRIBED MOST
OF HIS NIGHTS. ONLY, INSTEAD OF IT
BEING ME, IT IS JUST SOME BLONDE
OR BRUNETTE...OR BOTH.

BUT, A GIRL CAN STILL
DREAM, CAN'T SHE?





ASPEN
 SEASONS
 SPRING 2005
 CHAPTER THREE
 MICHAEL L. GUNNELL
 SOULFIRE



Living off the
 Land
 WRITTEN BY: J.I. KRUL
 PENCILED BY: MICAH GUNNELL
 COLORED BY: BETH SOTELO



*M*OST PEOPLE LOOK BACK ON
THEIR DAYS OF YOUTH WITH AN
ALMOST MYSTICAL FONDNESS.

THEY MUTE THE PAIN AND
THE SUFFERING AND THE EVIL,
BLOCKING OUT THE HATE AND
REMEMBERING ONLY THE LOVE.

THEY BURY THE HARSHER ELEMENTS
OF REALITY AND SEE ONLY A PAST
FILLED WITH VIRTUE AND PEACE.

BUT, SOME OF US DID NOT
HAVE TO HIDE OUR PAST OR
RUN FROM THE DARK. OUR
TIME TRULY WAS ONE OF
LIGHT AND HOPE, FILLED
WITH A WONDER AND
HAPPINESS UNPARALLELED
THROUGHOUT EXISTENCE.



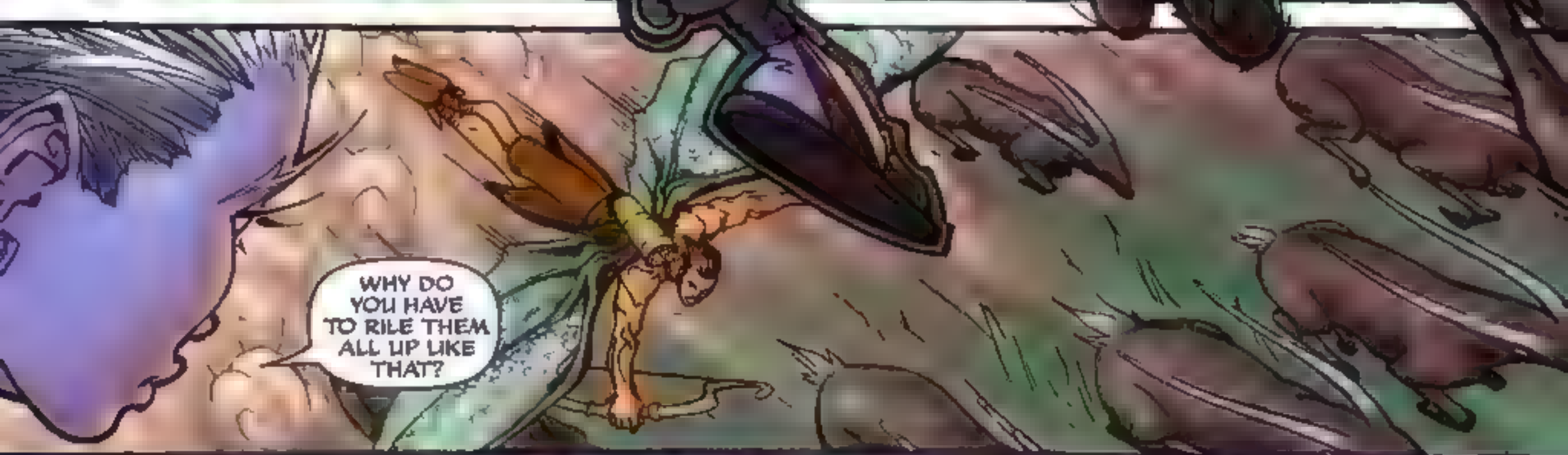
THE TIME OF OUR
YOUTH WAS NOTHING
SHORT OF... **MAGICAL**





DEX!

SORRY TO INTERRUPT YOUR LEISURELY DANCE THROUGH THE DAISIES, FAYE, BUT ONE OF THESE BOYS HAS MY NAME ON IT.



WHY DO YOU HAVE TO RILE THEM ALL UP LIKE THAT?



IT'S CALLED HUNTING. WHAT SPORT WOULD THERE BE IN SIMPLY PICKING OFF THE WEAKEST OF THE HERD? THIS WAY, THEY ALL HAVE A SHOT.



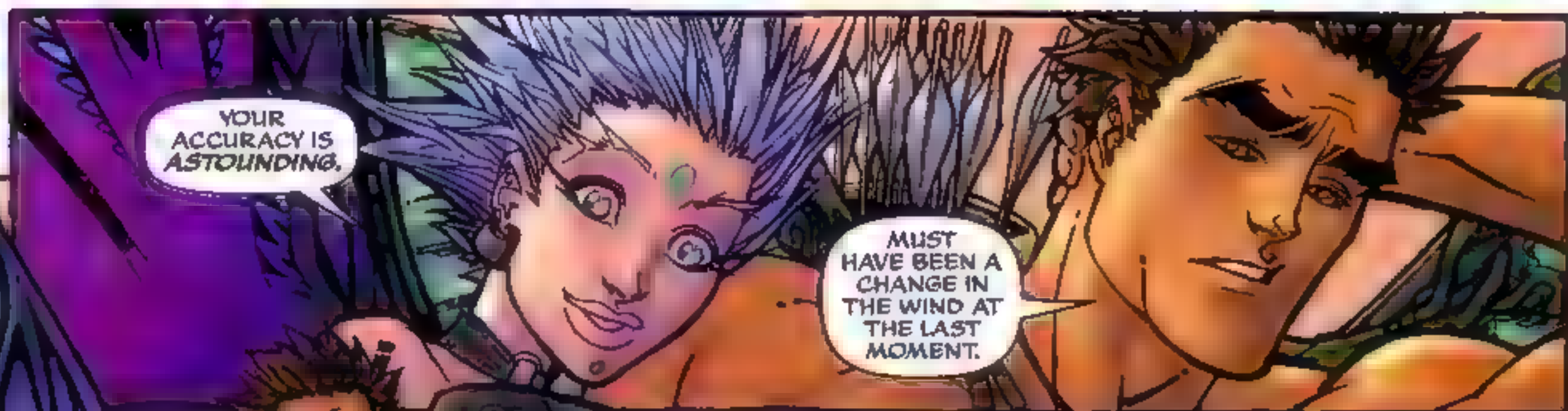
HOWEVER...

THEY REALLY
DON'T STAND
A CHANCE.

WITH MY
SKILLS.



NICE
SHOOTING,
DEX.



YOUR
ACCURACY IS
ASTOUNDING.

MUST
HAVE BEEN A
CHANGE IN
THE WIND AT
THE LAST
MOMENT.



OH, I
AM *SURE*
THAT WAS
THE CASE.

I WOULDN'T
LAUGH IF I WERE
YOU. THAT WAS
SUPPOSED TO BE OUR
DINNER TONIGHT. NOW,
THERE WILL BE
NOTHING TO EAT.



I GUESS
THAT WOULD
BE TRUE...



...IF I HAD
FAITH IN YOUR
HUNTING ABILITY
OVER MY
GATHERING
ABILITY.

MMM...
THAT LOOKS
PRETTY
GOOD.



YOU
KNOW WHAT,
FAYE?

WHAT?

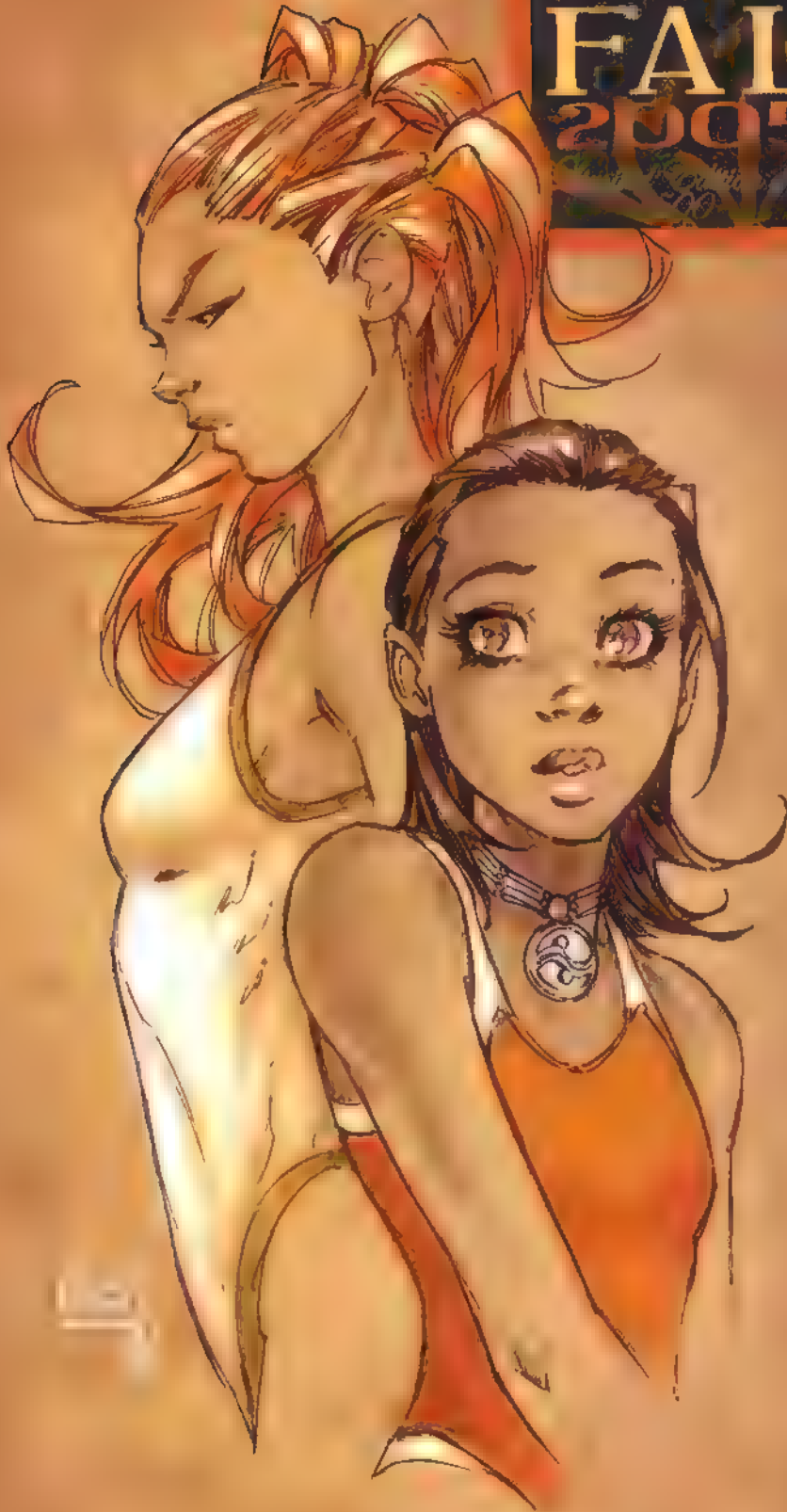
THAT'S WHY
WE MAKE SUCH
A GOOD TEAM.
YOU ALWAYS PULL
YOUR WEIGHT.

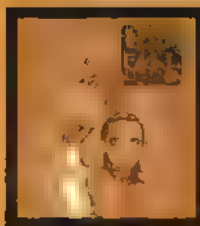
DON'T YOU
MEAN PICK UP
THE SLACK?

MAGICAL TIMES INDEED,
HOWEVER, EVEN THE
BRIGHTEST OF WORLDS
CANNOT ENDURE FOREVER.
EVENTUALLY, THE LIGHT
MUST FLICKER AND FADE.

AND THE QUESTION
REMAINS— WILL SUCH
TIMES EVER SHINE AGAIN?

END





Cover B & MTA

LETTERED BY DREAMER DESIGN :: EDITED BY VINCE HERNANDEZ
DESIGN & PRODUCTION BY MARK ROSLAN AND PETER STEIGERWALD

MICHAEL TURNER
 FRANK MASTROMARCO
 PETER STEIGERWALD



VINCE HERNANDEZ
JESSIE
MARK ROSIAN

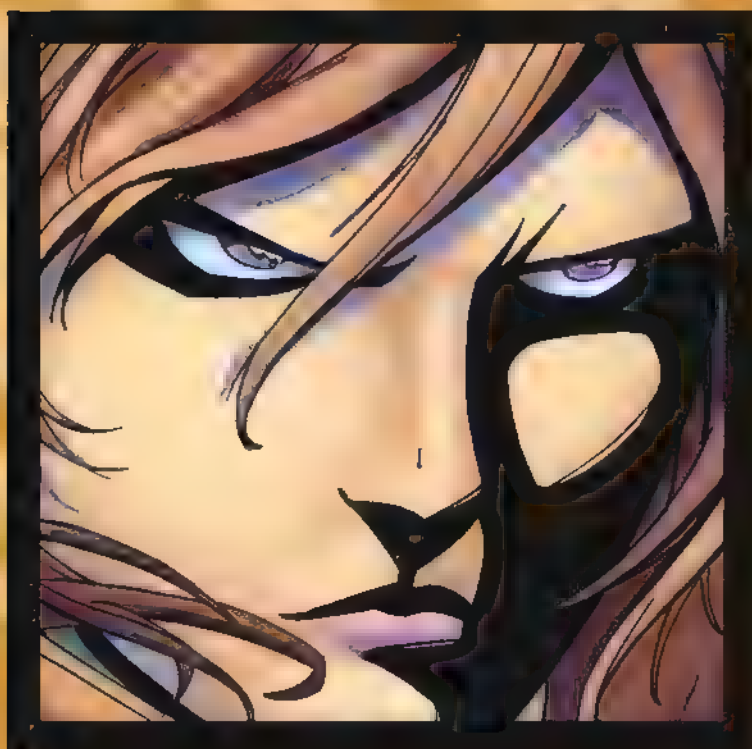
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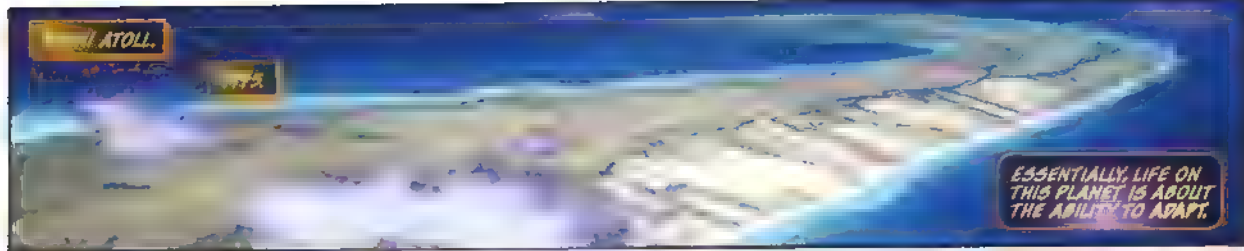
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ASPEN
SEASONS
FALL
2005



HER STORY
VIOLIN
WRITTEN BY: J.T. KRUL
PENCILED BY: MARCUS TO
INKED BY: DON HO
COLORED BY: DAVID MORAN



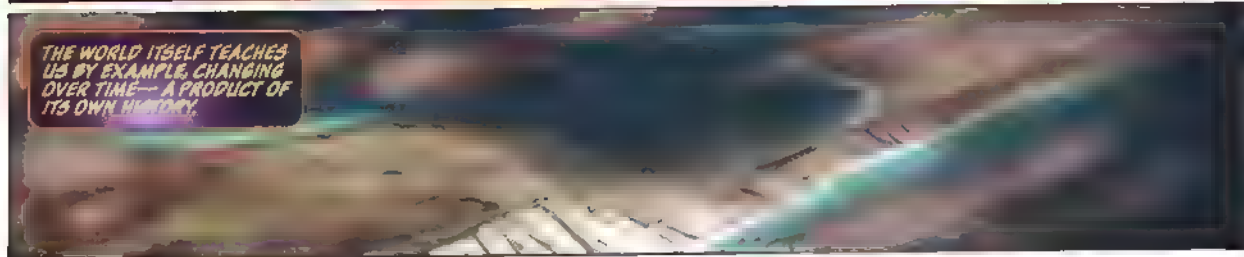
ATOLL.

ESSENTIALLY, LIFE ON
THIS PLANET IS ABOUT
THE ABILITY TO ADAPT.

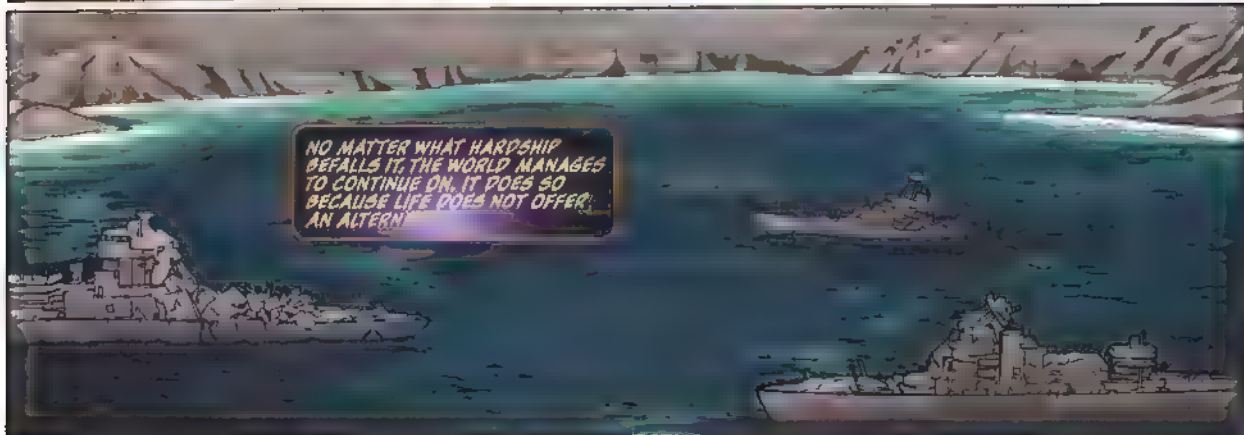
NOT SO MUCH IN TERMS
OF EVOLUTION OF THE
SPECIES, BUT SIMPLY THE
STRENGTH TO ENDURE
ONE'S OWN ENVIRONMENT.



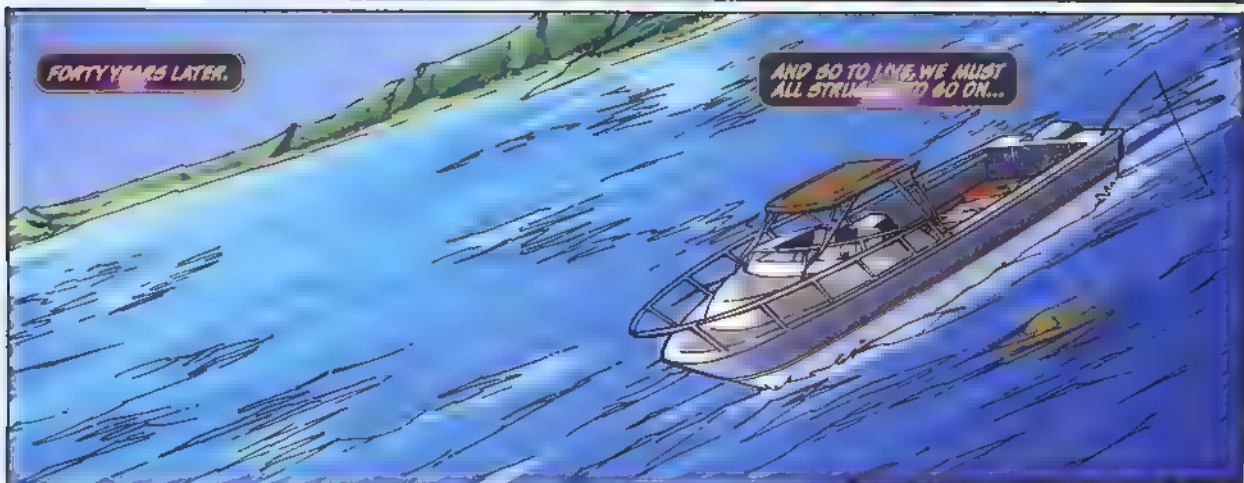
REACTING TO EXTERIOR
FORCES-- BOTH NATURAL
AND OTHERS.



THE WORLD ITSELF TEACHES
US BY EXAMPLE, CHANGING
OVER TIME-- A PRODUCT OF
ITS OWN HISTORY.



NO MATTER WHAT HARDSHIP
BEFALLS IT, THE WORLD MANAGES
TO CONTINUE ON. IT DOES SO
BECAUSE LIFE DOES NOT OFFER
AN ALTERNATIVE.



FORTY YEARS LATER.

AND SO TO LIVE, WE MUST
ALL STRIVE TO GO ON...

...AS PRODUCTS
OF OUR HISTORY.

MY LIFE HAS BEEN SHAPED BY PAIN
AND DESTRUCTION. MY PARENTS
DIED IN MARIELLE WHEN THE CITY
WAS DEVASTATED AS A RESULT OF
THE HUMANS. APPARENTLY, THEY
WERE TESTING SOME NEW WEAPON
AND MARIELLE HAPPENED
TO BE IN THE LINE OF FIRE.

ALL OF THIS I LEARNED
AS HISTORY, RATHER THAN
MEMORY. MY HOME AND
MY FAMILY WERE TAKEN
FROM ME BEFORE I WAS
EVEN OLD ENOUGH TO
KNOW.

CASQUE BECAME MY GUARDIAN
AND MY MENTOR. HE RAISED ME,
TRYING TO HELP ME REIGN IN MY
HATRED TOWARD THE HUMANS
FOR WHAT THEY HAD DONE.



EVENUALLY, CASQUE
SENT ME TO BECOME
PART OF THE COUNCIL'S
SECURITY FORCE UNDER
THE GUIDANCE OF CANON.

BOTH THOUGHT THAT
BY CONQUERING MY
EMOTIONS, I COULD
BECOME A VALUABLE
WARRIOR.



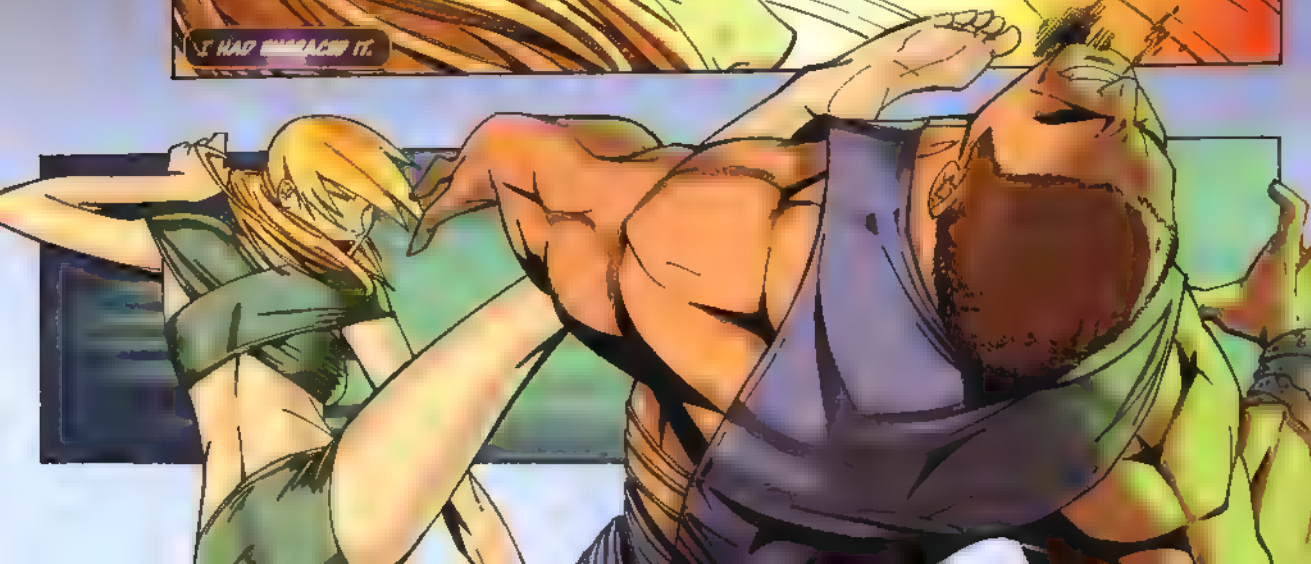
THEY WERE ONLY
HALF RIGHT.



I DID BECOME A VALUABLE
MEMBER OF THE SECURITY
FORCE, BUT I HAD NOT
OVERCOME MY ANGER.



I HAD ~~EMBRACED~~ IT.



NO MATTER WHO I
STOOD AGAINST, EVERY
OPPONENT TOOK THE
SAME... MY MIND...



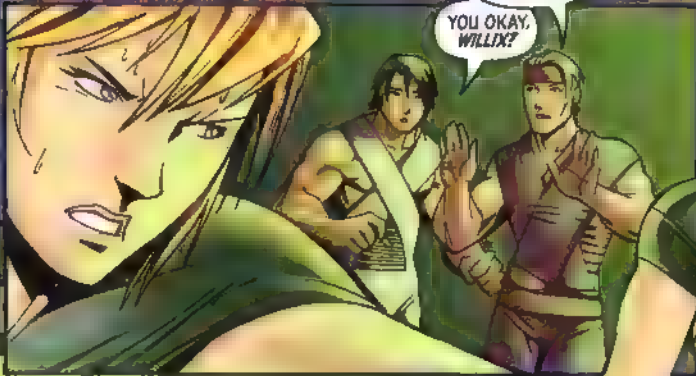
...HUMAN.



KIAN!!

DON'T YOU
THINK THAT'S
ENOUGH?

YOU OKAY,
WILLIX?



SORRY,
I GUESS I
GOT CARRIED
AWAY.

THEY WERE
ALL SCARED
OF ME.



YEAH,
I'M FINE

SO WAS I ACTUALLY, BUT
WHILE THEY WORRIED ABOUT
MY ANGER BOILING OVER, I
WORRIED ABOUT IT DYING OUT.

BECAUSE IF IT
DID, WHAT WOULD
I HAVE IT?

THIS IS MY
MANSION...

...A CITY OF THE
DEAD AND THE
FORGOTTEN.

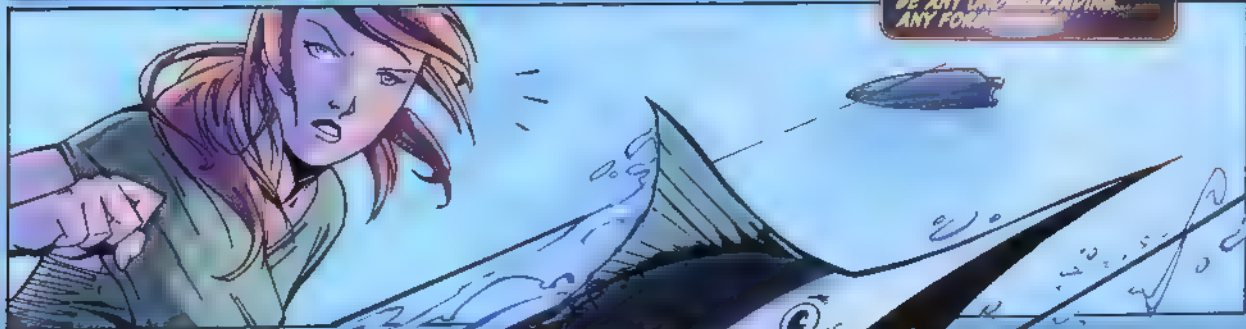
SORT OF LIKE
MY GYMNOOM?



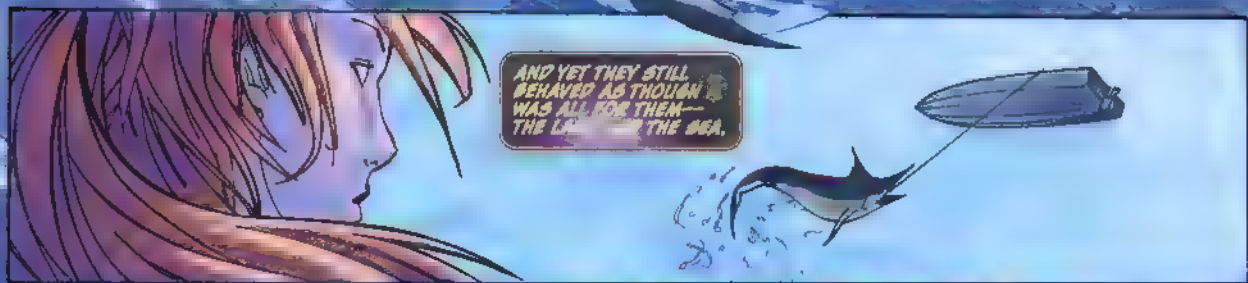


I USED TO WONDER ABOUT
THE HUMANS. DID THEY
KNOW WHAT THEY HAD
DONE? I DON'T CARE.

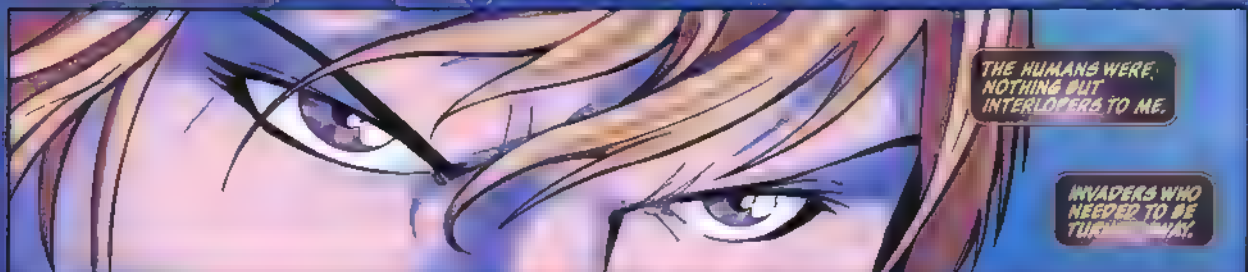
THEN I REALIZED THAT I WAS
THE ONE THAT DIDN'T CARE.
FOR ME THERE COULD NEVER
BE ANY UNDERSTANDING
ANY MORE.



THE HUMANS HAD
A DOMAIN OF THE WORLD
ABOVE, BUT THE WORLD
BELOW WAS MINE. THEY
DID NOT BELONG HERE.

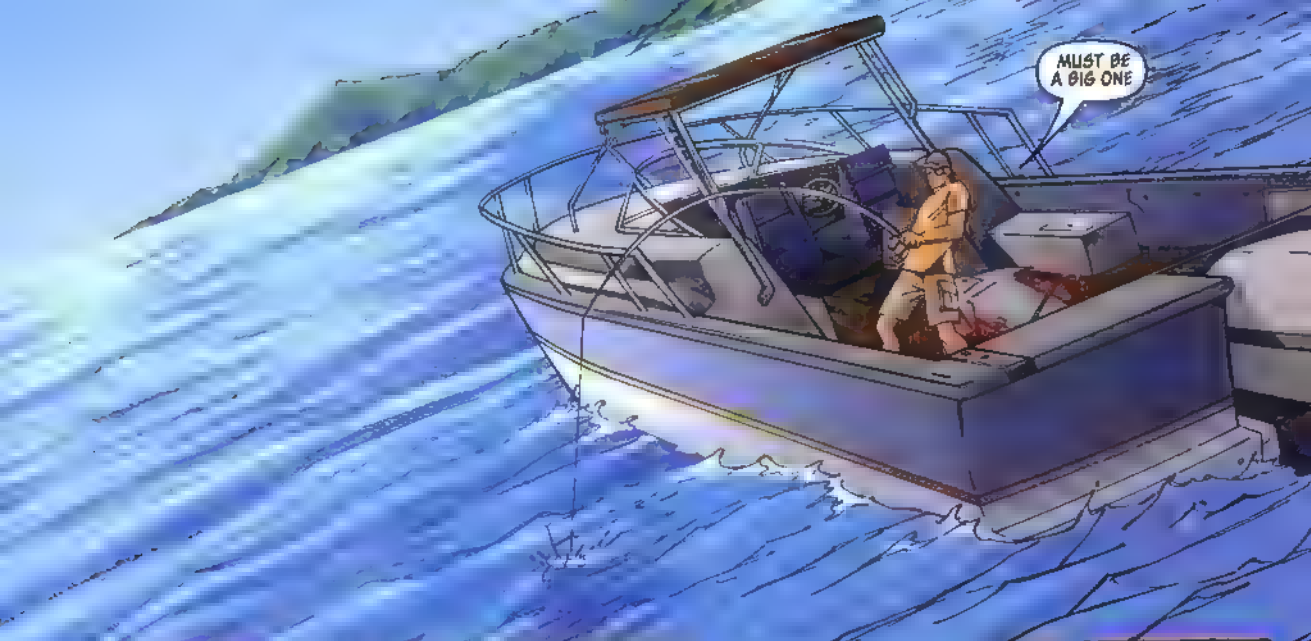


AND YET THEY STILL
BEHAVED AS THOUGH
THE LAND WAS ALL FOR THEM—
THE LAND AND THE SEA.

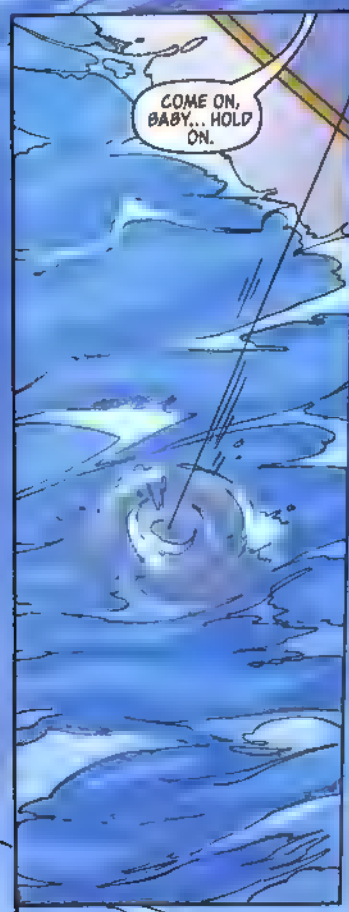


THE HUMANS WERE
NOTHING BUT
INTERLOPERS TO ME.

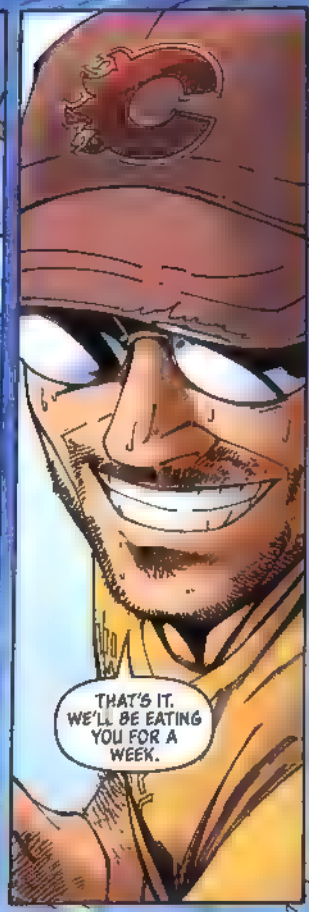
INVADERS WHO
NEEDED TO BE
TURNED AWAY.



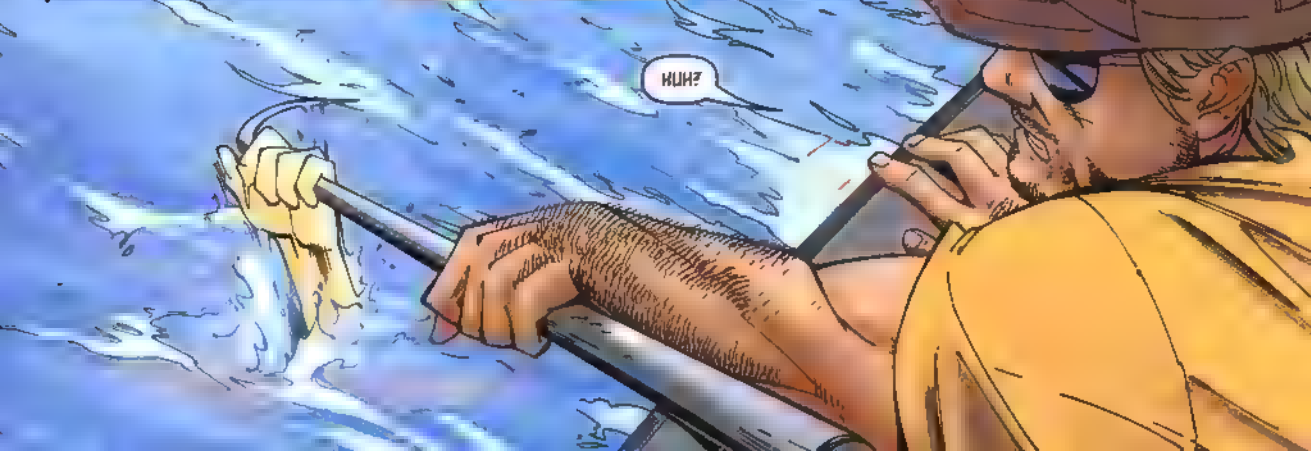
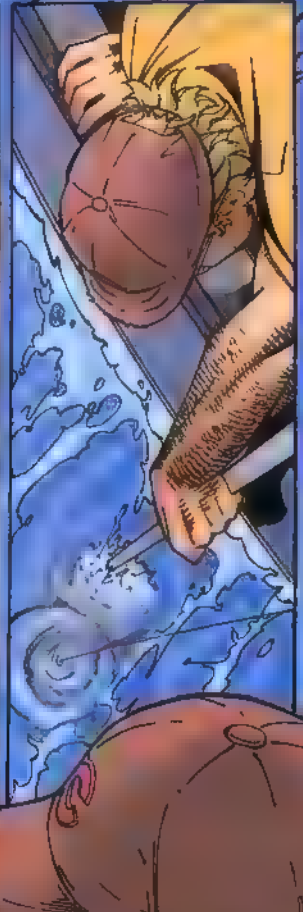
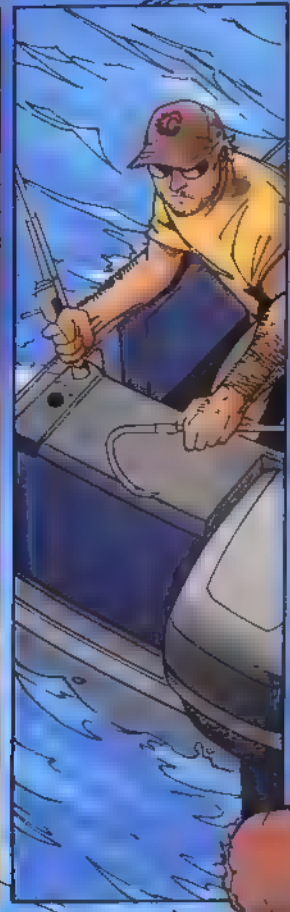
MUST BE A BIG ONE



COME ON, BABY... HOLD ON.



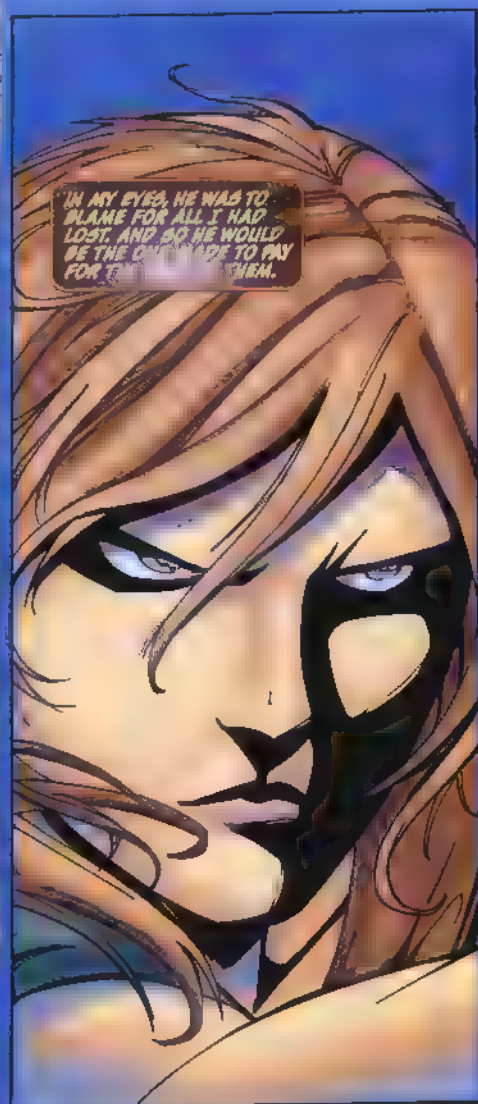
THAT'S IT. WE'LL BE EATING YOU FOR A WEEK.



HUH?



AHHHH!

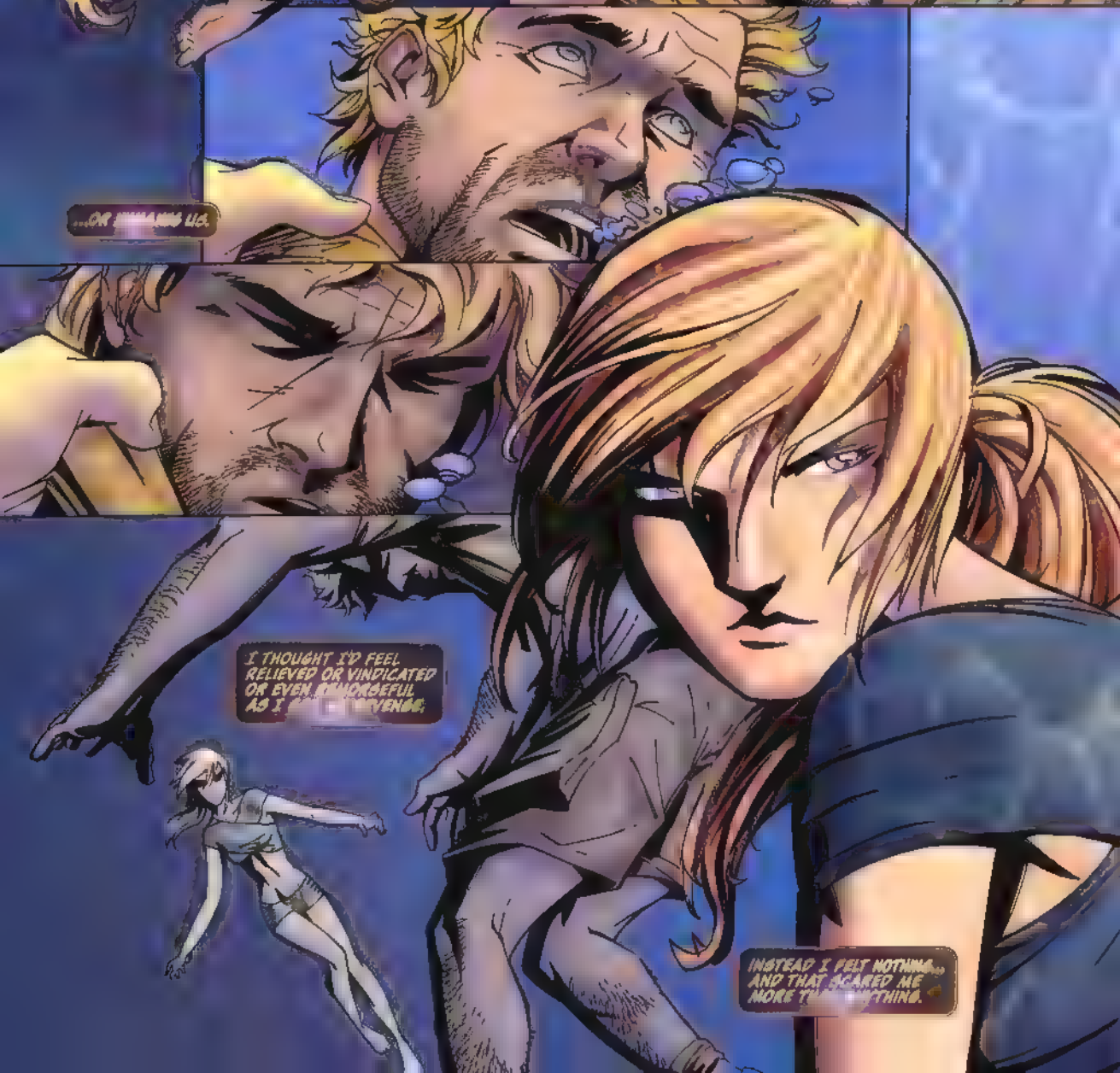


IN MY EYES, HE WAS TO
BLAME FOR ALL I HAD
LOST, AND SO HE WOULD
BE THE ONE MADE TO PAY
FOR THEM.



IN A WAY, HIS FATE
WAS SEALED JUST
LIKE MINE ON THAT
DAY... 1000 AGO.

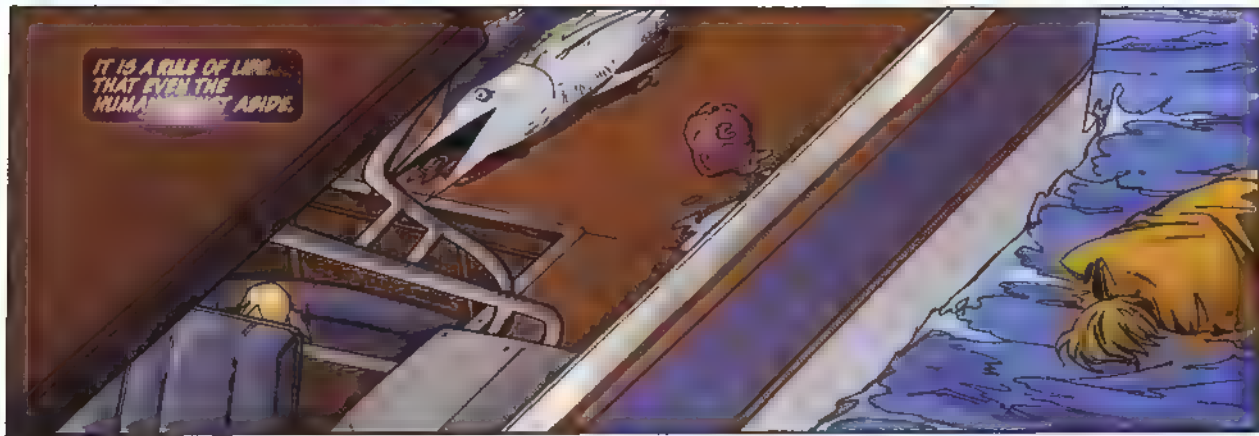
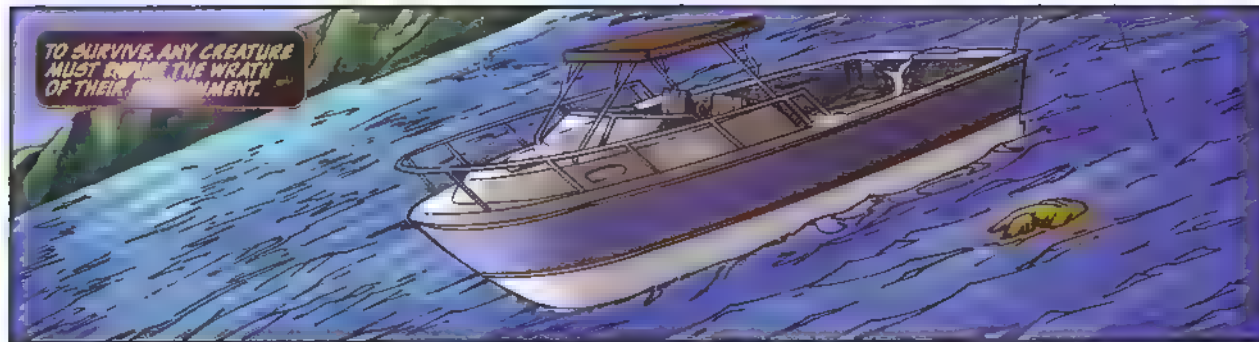
OUR HISTORY
MATTERS.



...OR MANKIND LIES.

I THOUGHT I'D FEEL
RELIEVED OR VINDICATED
OR EVEN REMORSEFUL
AS I GOT MY REVENGE.

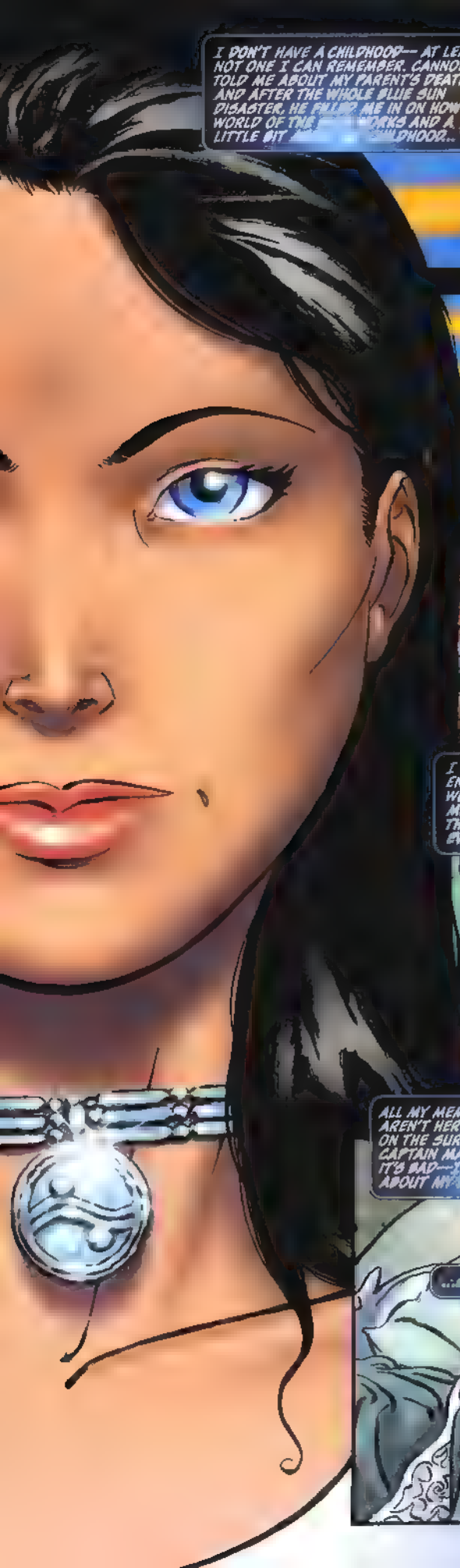
INSTEAD I FELT NOTHING...
AND THAT SCARED ME
MORE THAN ANYTHING.



ASPEN
SEASONS
FALL
2005



Kisela
STORY AND ARTWORK BY:
PETER STEIGERWALD
EXTRA SPECIAL THANKS TO: MARK ROSLAN



I DON'T HAVE A CHILDHOOD— AT LEAST NOT ONE I CAN REMEMBER. CANNON'S TOLD ME ABOUT MY PARENT'S DEATH, AND AFTER THE WHOLE BLUE SUN DISASTER, HE PUT ME IN ON HOW THE WORLD OF THE ... WORKS AND A LITTLE BIT ... CHILDHOOD...

...BUT I HAVE A FEELING HE'S BEING INTENTIONALLY VAGUE, NOT THAT HE'S LYING TO ME, BUT LIKE THERE'S SOME BIG FAMILY SECRET THAT I DON'T ... BE IN ON.

IT MAKES ME FEEL AS IF I'M A LITTLE GIRL AND AS ODD AS IT SOUNDS, I'VE NEVER FELT LIKE ONE BEFORE. MY LIFE FOR ME BEGAN WHEN I WAS ... WITH THE FIRST THING I REMEMBER ... PARADISE.



ON THE PARADISE I MET CAPTAIN MATTHEWS. HE ADOPTED ME. HIS FIRST NAME WAS JOHN... BUT NO ONE EVER CALLED HIM THAT. HE WAS IN THE US NAVY AND EVERYONE CALLED HIM CAPTAIN... I THOUGHT ... HIS FIRST NAME FOR ...

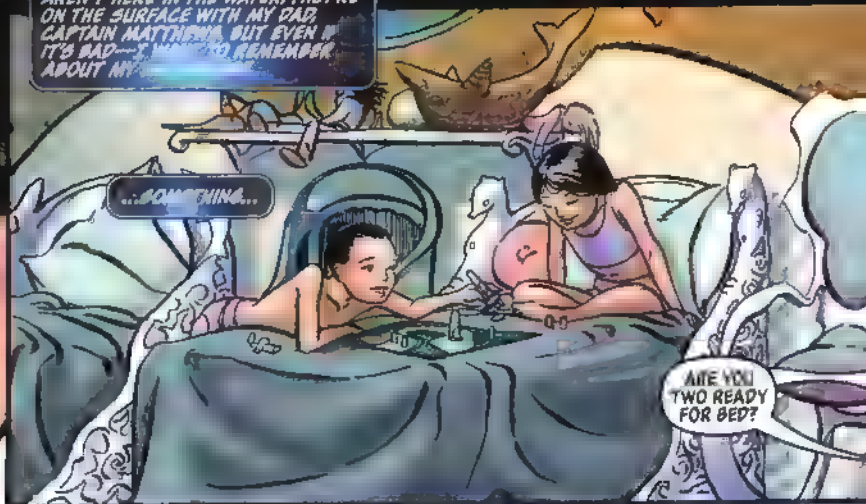
I READ AND UNDERSTOOD ENGLISH FINE BUT HIS WHOLE WORLD WAS STRANGE TO ME. EVERYTHING THE FOOD, THE SMALL ... NOISES... EVEN THE ...

BUT HE WAS MY WHOLE FAMILY-- THE ONLY PARENT I'VE EVER KNOWN. NOW A WHOLE NEW WORLD HAS OPENED UP TO ME AND NOW I ... HAVE MORE ...

...MEMORIES OF A MOTHER... OF THE BROTHER CANNON SAYS ...

OF MY BIRTH FATHER ...

ALL MY MEMORIES OF ANY FAMILY AREN'T HERE IN THE WATER. THEY'RE ON THE SURFACE WITH MY DAD, CAPTAIN MATTHEWS, BUT EVEN IF IT'S BAD—I ... TO REMEMBER ABOUT MY ...



...SOMETHING...

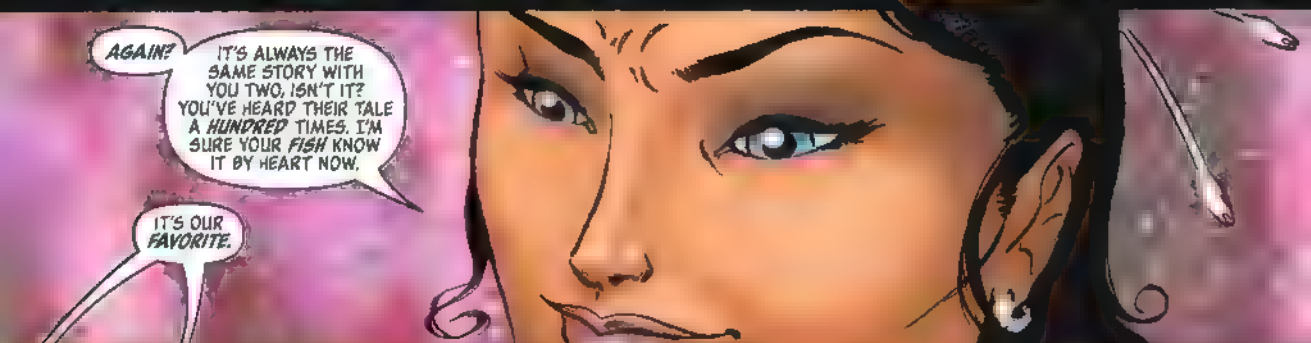
ARE YOU TWO READY FOR BED?



WHAT DO WE
WANT TO HEAR
FOR OUR STORY
TONIGHT.



TELL US
ABOUT KISELA
AND XENE
AGAIN.



AGAIN?

IT'S ALWAYS THE
SAME STORY WITH
YOU TWO, ISN'T IT?
YOU'VE HEARD THEIR TALE
A HUNDRED TIMES. I'M
SURE YOUR FISH KNOW
IT BY HEART NOW.

IT'S OUR
FAVORITE.



WELL THEN,
HMMM... TONIGHT WE'LL
TELL THE **BEGINNING**--
ABOUT HOW THEY CAME INTO
THE BLUE. READY? HOW DO
ALL TALES BEGIN?

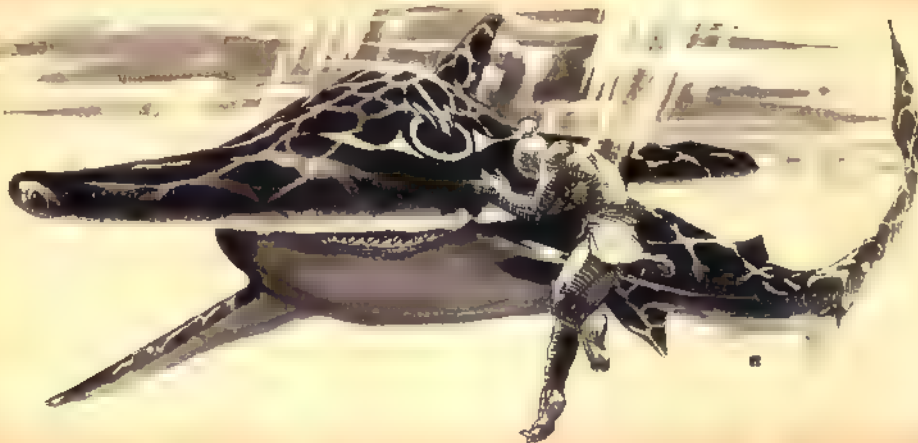
FULL CIRCLE,
ENCLOSED ARE WE,
IN COUNCIL, IN KING, IN
BOUNDED SEA, FROM
BLACK TO BLUE--
AND FREE...



NOW, IN DAYS
LONG PAST AND IN
SEAS LONG DRY-- AFTER
WE ROSE UP FROM THE
BLACK AND THE BLUE WAS
STILL **NEW**-- THERE LIVED
AN OLD FISHER COUPLE
ON THE EDGE OF
INDUSIA...

They were good people and loved each other very much, but they were lonely. They worked long days setting the nets and hauling in the catch. It was a hard life but they were good at their craft. The Old Man knew the best spots to lay their nets and traps and the Old Woman knew the best baits. Together they always brought in the best catches of the village. Their village was named Ti-U'iaka after the Hammerhead King, U'iaka. King U'iaka and his brothers patrolled the borders of the village and protected it—keeping other fishers from raiding them. In return the villagers paid tribute to them with a portion of all their catches. This relationship made Ti-U'iaka a safe and pleasant place to raise a family.

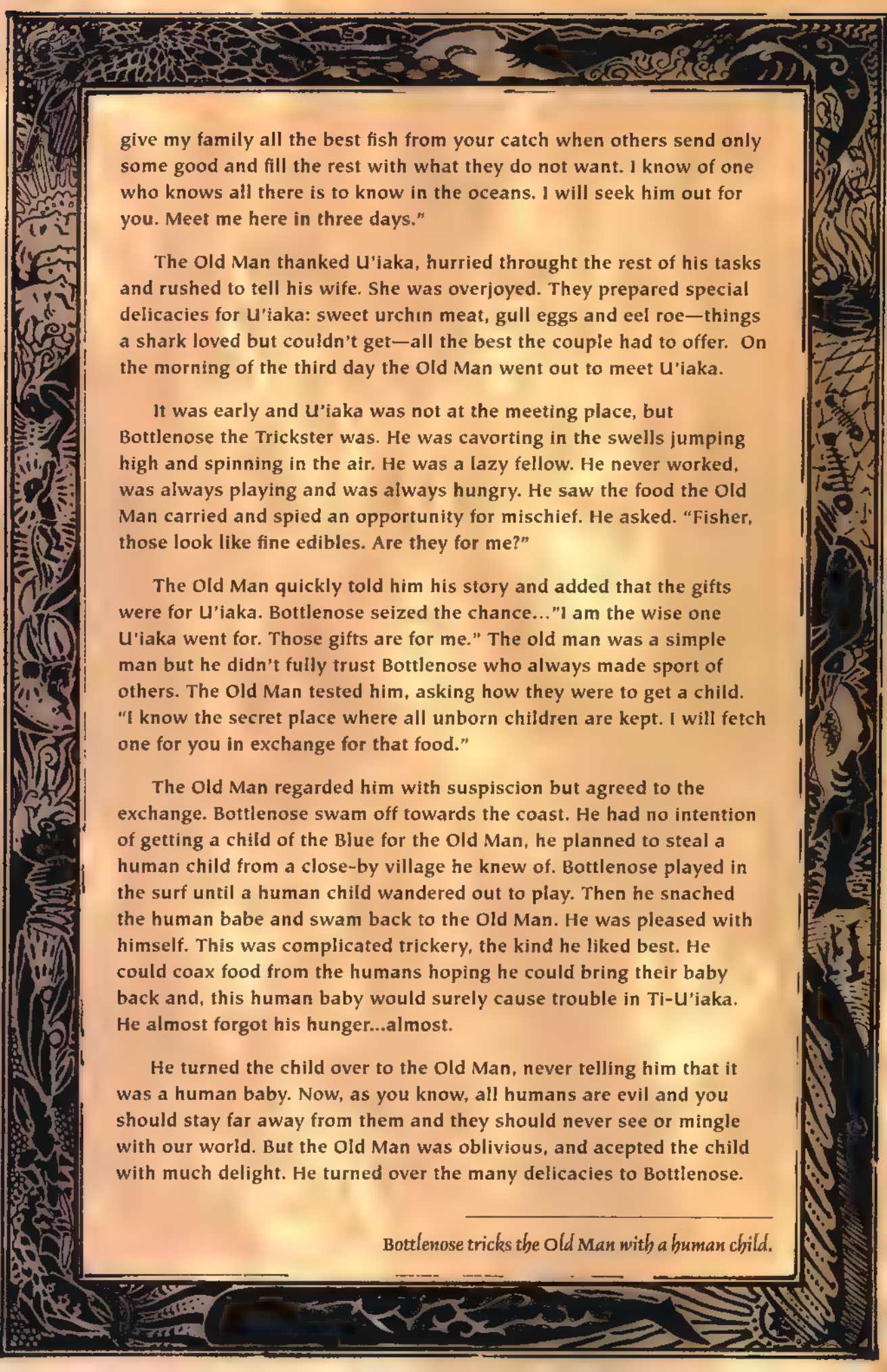
The Old Couple's home was on the edge of the village. They had set great rocks to protect them from storms and their home was good and solid, made of sea-grass and stone. They were wise and respected. Life had given them all it could except one thing, a child to fill the aching in their hearts.



The Old Man beseeches U'iaka.

Other villagers had children to help them when they grew old. The Old Couple wasn't jealous of the other's happiness, but they wanted to pass on their nets, knowledge and love to a son or daughter of their own. Together they decided to ask the shark king for help with their plight. The next day while setting his nets the Old Man kept an eye out for the giant. He was not hard to miss; he was the length of six men from head to tail and the color of a moonless night. The Old Man called to U'iaka as he swam by and told him of their woes.

"Alas, I can be of no help to you in this" U'iaka said. "We sharks know only the secrets of our kind. But you and your wife are kind and



give my family all the best fish from your catch when others send only some good and fill the rest with what they do not want. I know of one who knows all there is to know in the oceans. I will seek him out for you. Meet me here in three days."

The Old Man thanked U'iaka, hurried through the rest of his tasks and rushed to tell his wife. She was overjoyed. They prepared special delicacies for U'iaka: sweet urchin meat, gull eggs and eel roe—things a shark loved but couldn't get—all the best the couple had to offer. On the morning of the third day the Old Man went out to meet U'iaka.

It was early and U'iaka was not at the meeting place, but Bottlenose the Trickster was. He was cavorting in the swells jumping high and spinning in the air. He was a lazy fellow. He never worked, was always playing and was always hungry. He saw the food the Old Man carried and spied an opportunity for mischief. He asked. "Fisher, those look like fine edibles. Are they for me?"

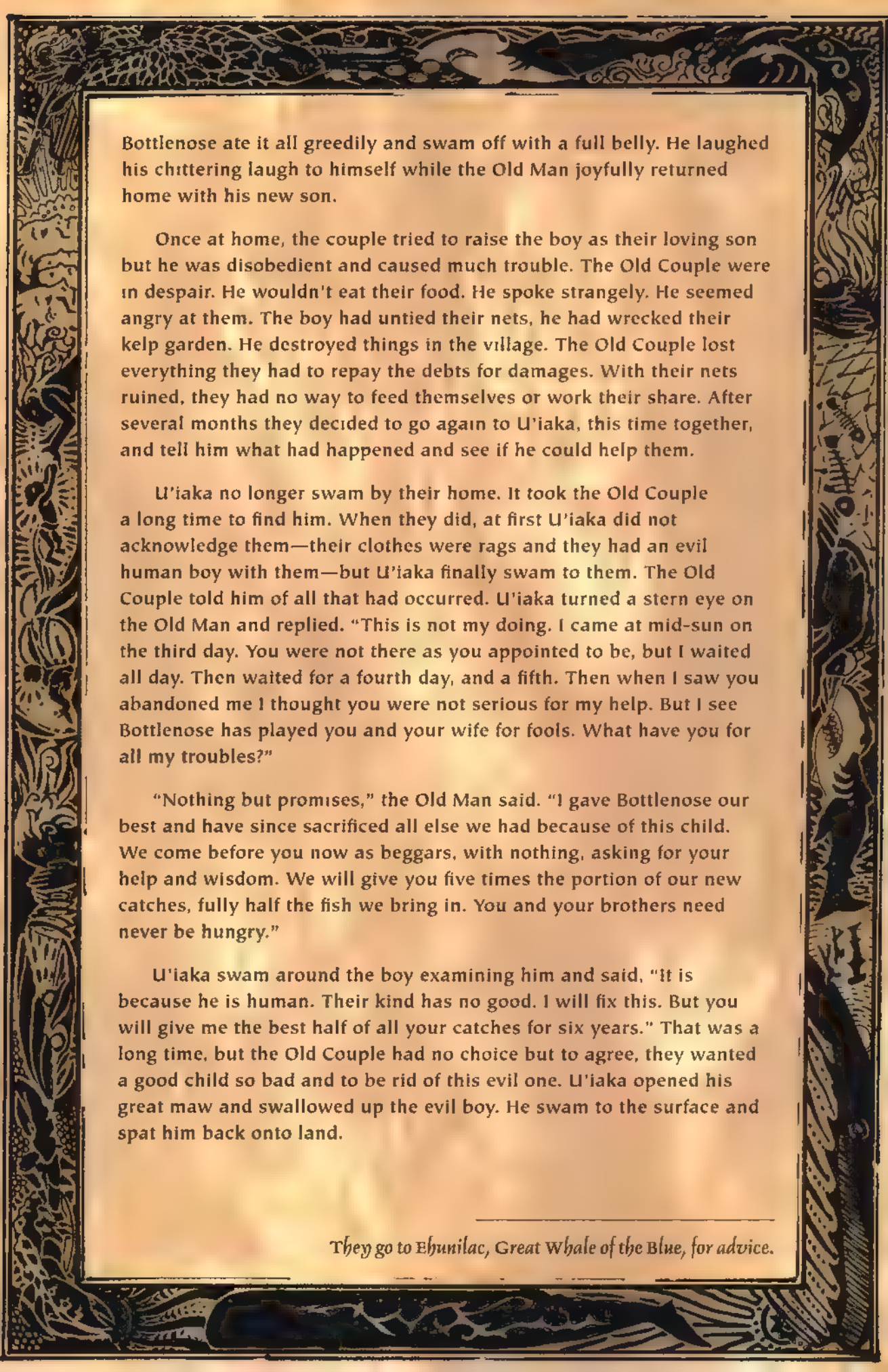
The Old Man quickly told him his story and added that the gifts were for U'iaka. Bottlenose seized the chance..."I am the wise one U'iaka went for. Those gifts are for me." The old man was a simple man but he didn't fully trust Bottlenose who always made sport of others. The Old Man tested him, asking how they were to get a child. "I know the secret place where all unborn children are kept. I will fetch one for you in exchange for that food."

The Old Man regarded him with suspicion but agreed to the exchange. Bottlenose swam off towards the coast. He had no intention of getting a child of the Blue for the Old Man, he planned to steal a human child from a close-by village he knew of. Bottlenose played in the surf until a human child wandered out to play. Then he snatched the human babe and swam back to the Old Man. He was pleased with himself. This was complicated trickery, the kind he liked best. He could coax food from the humans hoping he could bring their baby back and, this human baby would surely cause trouble in Ti-U'iaka. He almost forgot his hunger...almost.

He turned the child over to the Old Man, never telling him that it was a human baby. Now, as you know, all humans are evil and you should stay far away from them and they should never see or mingle with our world. But the Old Man was oblivious, and accepted the child with much delight. He turned over the many delicacies to Bottlenose.

Bottlenose tricks the Old Man with a human child.





Bottlenose ate it all greedily and swam off with a full belly. He laughed his chattering laugh to himself while the Old Man joyfully returned home with his new son.

Once at home, the couple tried to raise the boy as their loving son but he was disobedient and caused much trouble. The Old Couple were in despair. He wouldn't eat their food. He spoke strangely. He seemed angry at them. The boy had untied their nets, he had wrecked their kelp garden. He destroyed things in the village. The Old Couple lost everything they had to repay the debts for damages. With their nets ruined, they had no way to feed themselves or work their share. After several months they decided to go again to U'iaka, this time together, and tell him what had happened and see if he could help them.

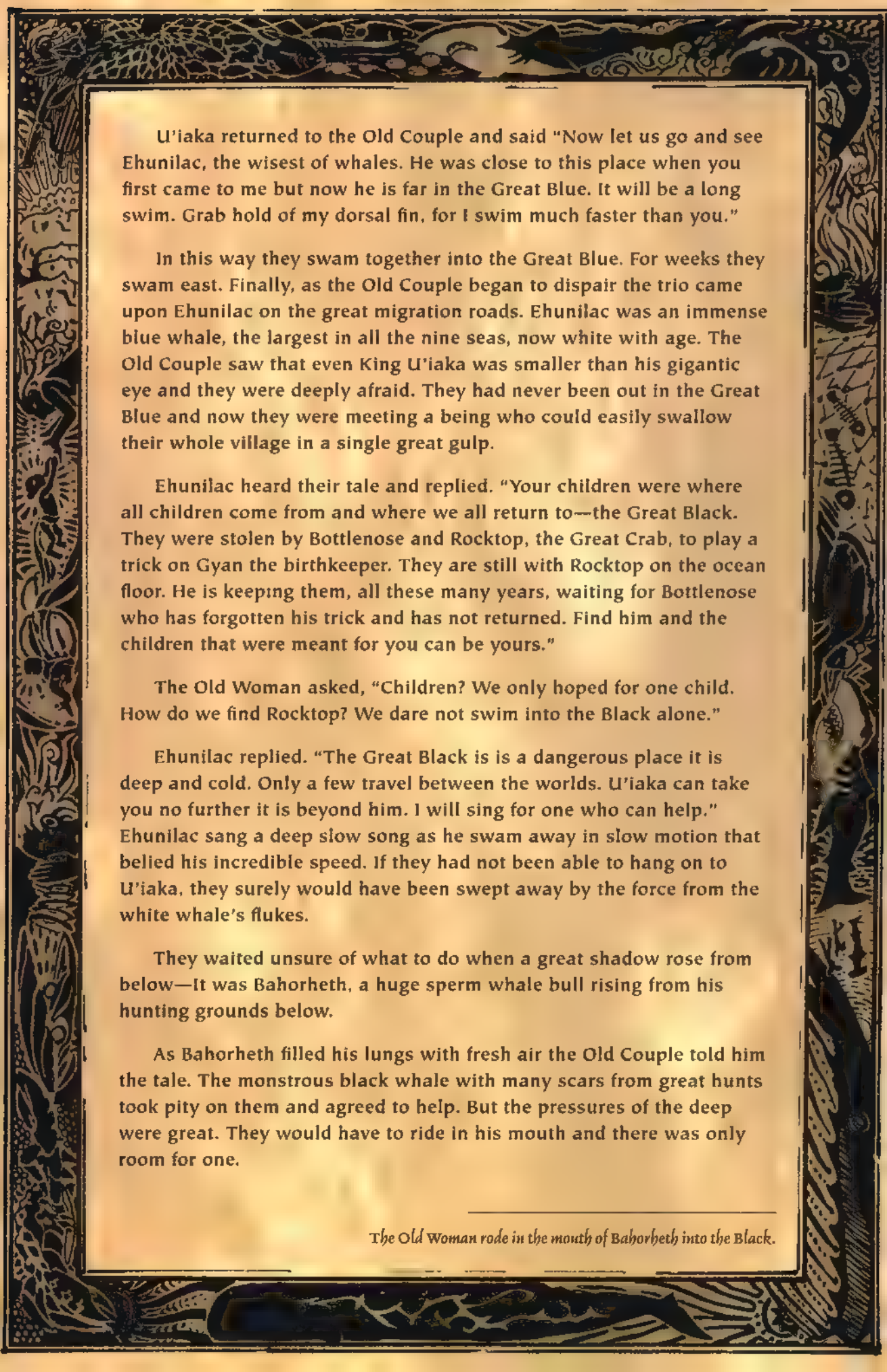
U'iaka no longer swam by their home. It took the Old Couple a long time to find him. When they did, at first U'iaka did not acknowledge them—their clothes were rags and they had an evil human boy with them—but U'iaka finally swam to them. The Old Couple told him of all that had occurred. U'iaka turned a stern eye on the Old Man and replied. "This is not my doing. I came at mid-sun on the third day. You were not there as you appointed to be, but I waited all day. Then waited for a fourth day, and a fifth. Then when I saw you abandoned me I thought you were not serious for my help. But I see Bottlenose has played you and your wife for fools. What have you for all my troubles?"

"Nothing but promises," the Old Man said. "I gave Bottlenose our best and have since sacrificed all else we had because of this child. We come before you now as beggars, with nothing, asking for your help and wisdom. We will give you five times the portion of our new catches, fully half the fish we bring in. You and your brothers need never be hungry."

U'iaka swam around the boy examining him and said, "It is because he is human. Their kind has no good. I will fix this. But you will give me the best half of all your catches for six years." That was a long time, but the Old Couple had no choice but to agree, they wanted a good child so bad and to be rid of this evil one. U'iaka opened his great maw and swallowed up the evil boy. He swam to the surface and spat him back onto land.

They go to Ehunilac, Great Whale of the Blue, for advice.





U'iaka returned to the Old Couple and said "Now let us go and see Ehunilac, the wisest of whales. He was close to this place when you first came to me but now he is far in the Great Blue. It will be a long swim. Grab hold of my dorsal fin, for I swim much faster than you."

In this way they swam together into the Great Blue. For weeks they swam east. Finally, as the Old Couple began to despair the trio came upon Ehunilac on the great migration roads. Ehunilac was an immense blue whale, the largest in all the nine seas, now white with age. The Old Couple saw that even King U'iaka was smaller than his gigantic eye and they were deeply afraid. They had never been out in the Great Blue and now they were meeting a being who could easily swallow their whole village in a single great gulp.

Ehunilac heard their tale and replied. "Your children were where all children come from and where we all return to—the Great Black. They were stolen by Bottlenose and Rocktop, the Great Crab, to play a trick on Gyan the birthkeeper. They are still with Rocktop on the ocean floor. He is keeping them, all these many years, waiting for Bottlenose who has forgotten his trick and has not returned. Find him and the children that were meant for you can be yours."

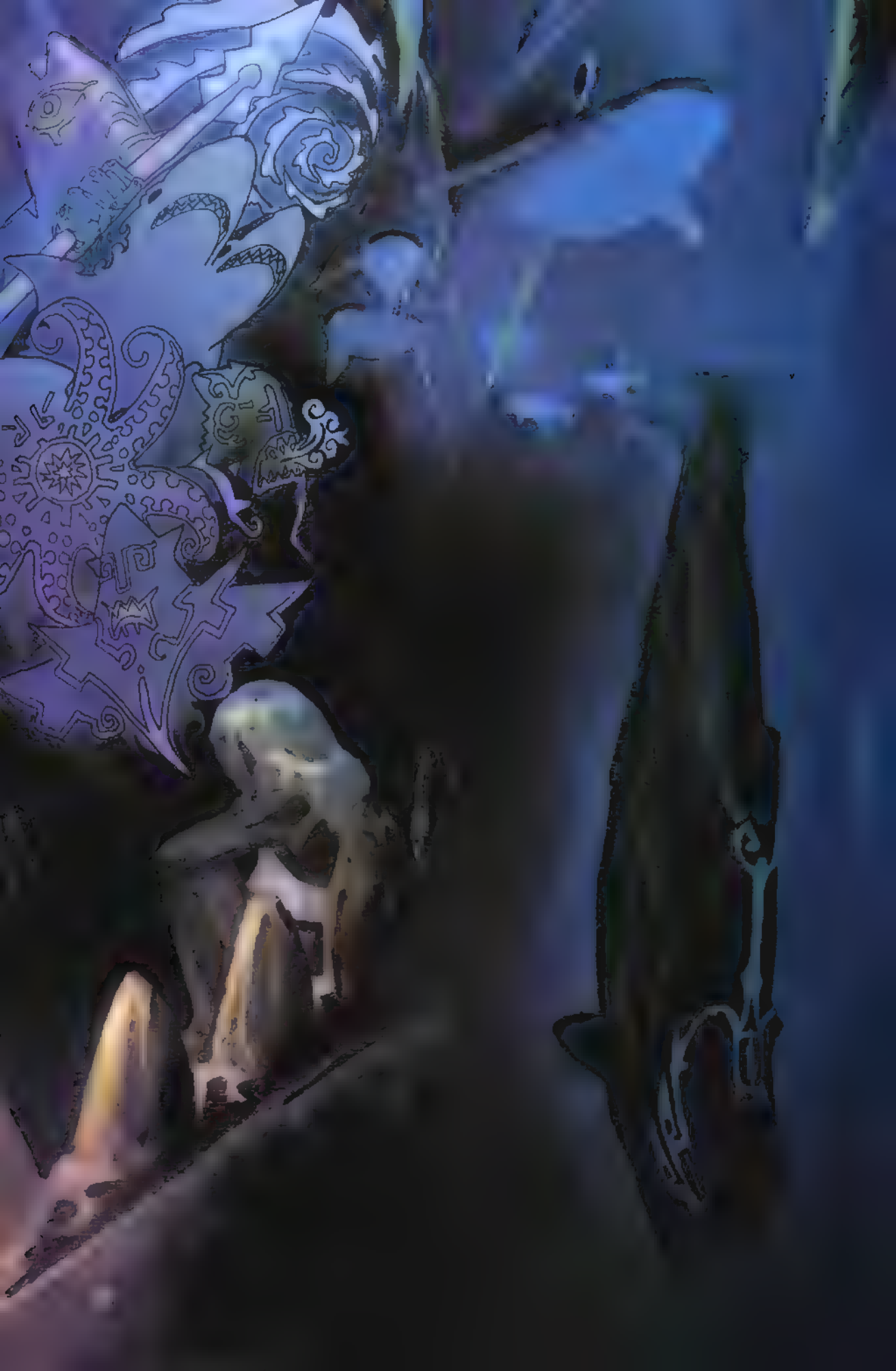
The Old Woman asked, "Children? We only hoped for one child. How do we find Rocktop? We dare not swim into the Black alone."

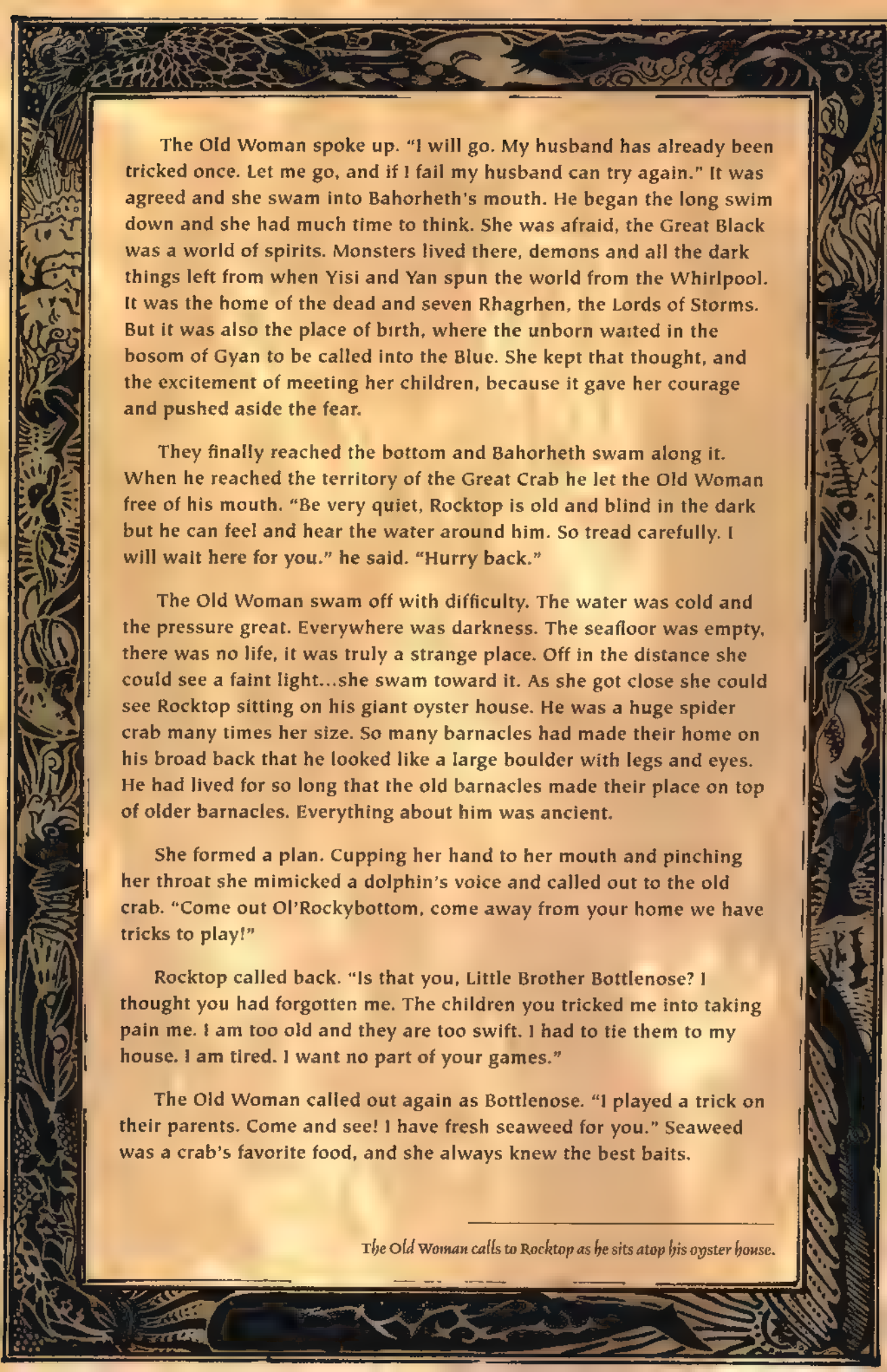
Ehunilac replied. "The Great Black is is a dangerous place it is deep and cold. Only a few travel between the worlds. U'iaka can take you no further it is beyond him. I will sing for one who can help." Ehunilac sang a deep slow song as he swam away in slow motion that belied his incredible speed. If they had not been able to hang on to U'iaka, they surely would have been swept away by the force from the white whale's flukes.

They waited unsure of what to do when a great shadow rose from below—it was Bahorheth, a huge sperm whale bull rising from his hunting grounds below.

As Bahorheth filled his lungs with fresh air the Old Couple told him the tale. The monstrous black whale with many scars from great hunts took pity on them and agreed to help. But the pressures of the deep were great. They would have to ride in his mouth and there was only room for one.

The Old Woman rode in the mouth of Bahorheth into the Black.





The Old Woman spoke up. "I will go. My husband has already been tricked once. Let me go, and if I fail my husband can try again." It was agreed and she swam into Bahorheth's mouth. He began the long swim down and she had much time to think. She was afraid, the Great Black was a world of spirits. Monsters lived there, demons and all the dark things left from when Yisi and Yan spun the world from the Whirlpool. It was the home of the dead and seven Rhagrhen, the Lords of Storms. But it was also the place of birth, where the unborn waited in the bosom of Gyan to be called into the Blue. She kept that thought, and the excitement of meeting her children, because it gave her courage and pushed aside the fear.

They finally reached the bottom and Bahorheth swam along it. When he reached the territory of the Great Crab he let the Old Woman free of his mouth. "Be very quiet, Rocktop is old and blind in the dark but he can feel and hear the water around him. So tread carefully. I will wait here for you." he said. "Hurry back."

The Old Woman swam off with difficulty. The water was cold and the pressure great. Everywhere was darkness. The seafloor was empty, there was no life, it was truly a strange place. Off in the distance she could see a faint light...she swam toward it. As she got close she could see Rocktop sitting on his giant oyster house. He was a huge spider crab many times her size. So many barnacles had made their home on his broad back that he looked like a large boulder with legs and eyes. He had lived for so long that the old barnacles made their place on top of older barnacles. Everything about him was ancient.

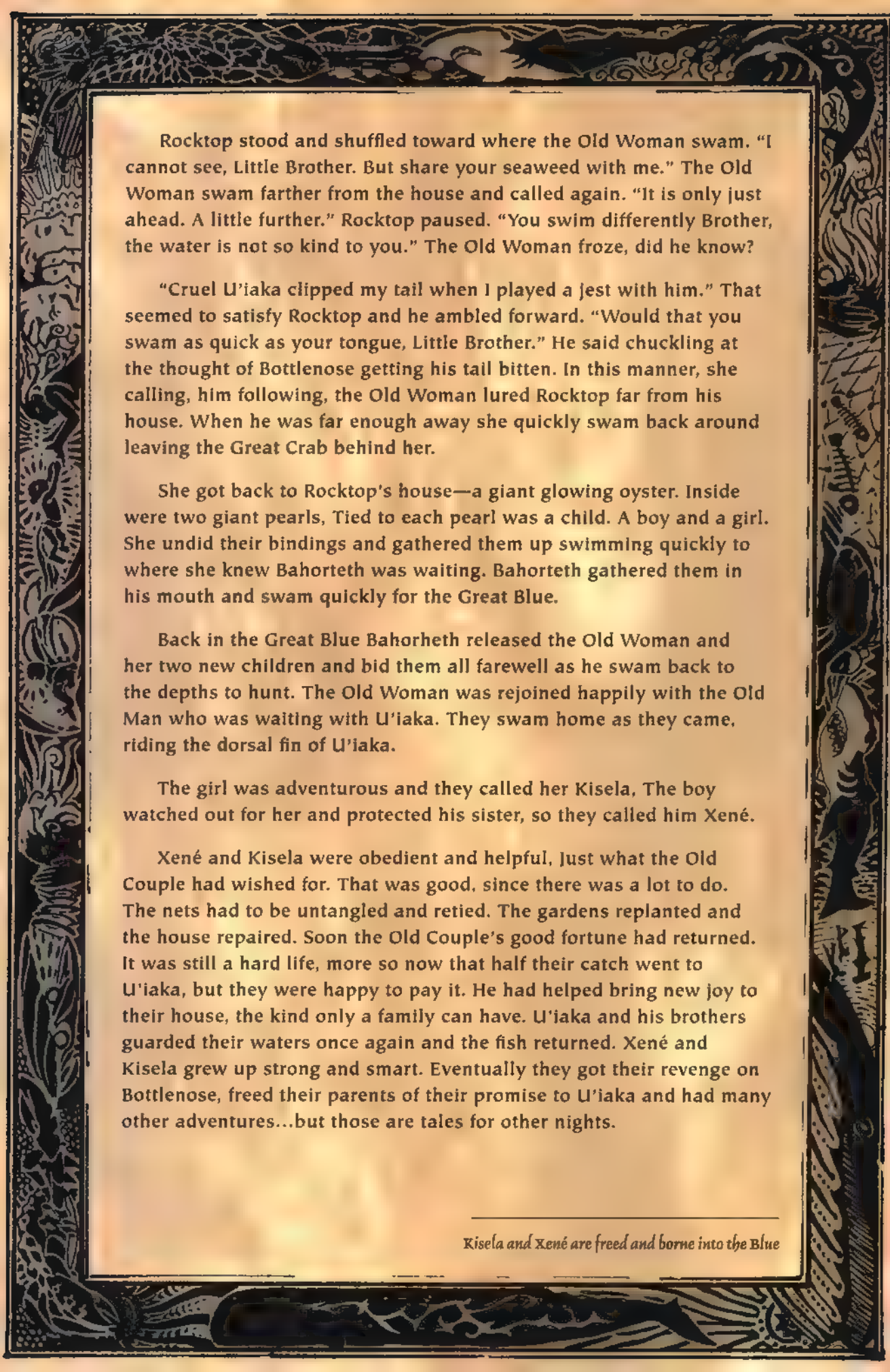
She formed a plan. Cupping her hand to her mouth and pinching her throat she mimicked a dolphin's voice and called out to the old crab. "Come out Ol'Rockybottom, come away from your home we have tricks to play!"

Rocktop called back. "Is that you, Little Brother Bottlenose? I thought you had forgotten me. The children you tricked me into taking pain me. I am too old and they are too swift. I had to tie them to my house. I am tired. I want no part of your games."

The Old Woman called out again as Bottlenose. "I played a trick on their parents. Come and see! I have fresh seaweed for you." Seaweed was a crab's favorite food, and she always knew the best baits.

The Old Woman calls to Rocktop as he sits atop his oyster house.





Rocktop stood and shuffled toward where the Old Woman swam. "I cannot see, Little Brother. But share your seaweed with me." The Old Woman swam farther from the house and called again. "It is only just ahead. A little further." Rocktop paused. "You swim differently Brother, the water is not so kind to you." The Old Woman froze, did he know?

"Cruel U'iaka clipped my tail when I played a jest with him." That seemed to satisfy Rocktop and he ambled forward. "Would that you swam as quick as your tongue, Little Brother." He said chuckling at the thought of Bottlenose getting his tail bitten. In this manner, she calling, him following, the Old Woman lured Rocktop far from his house. When he was far enough away she quickly swam back around leaving the Great Crab behind her.

She got back to Rocktop's house—a giant glowing oyster. Inside were two giant pearls, Tied to each pearl was a child. A boy and a girl. She undid their bindings and gathered them up swimming quickly to where she knew Bahortheth was waiting. Bahortheth gathered them in his mouth and swam quickly for the Great Blue.

Back in the Great Blue Bahortheth released the Old Woman and her two new children and bid them all farewell as he swam back to the depths to hunt. The Old Woman was rejoined happily with the Old Man who was waiting with U'iaka. They swam home as they came, riding the dorsal fin of U'iaka.

The girl was adventurous and they called her Kisela, The boy watched out for her and protected his sister, so they called him Xené.

Xené and Kisela were obedient and helpful, just what the Old Couple had wished for. That was good, since there was a lot to do. The nets had to be untangled and retied. The gardens replanted and the house repaired. Soon the Old Couple's good fortune had returned. It was still a hard life, more so now that half their catch went to U'iaka, but they were happy to pay it. He had helped bring new joy to their house, the kind only a family can have. U'iaka and his brothers guarded their waters once again and the fish returned. Xené and Kisela grew up strong and smart. Eventually they got their revenge on Bottlenose, freed their parents of their promise to U'iaka and had many other adventures...but those are tales for other nights.

Kisela and Xené are freed and borne into the Blue





GOOD NIGHT
ASPEN, MY LITTLE
KISELA. DREAM OF
OPEN WATER AND FAST
CURRENTS, OF BLUE
AND PEACE.



...SOMETHING...

...SOMETHING...

...ANYTHING ABOUT
WHAT MAKES ME BLUE.



**"Aspen
Matthews"**

ILLUSTRATION BY: ELIZABETH

BRIZZI

ASPEN SEASONS

Anna L. Evans & R. A. Ross: Jack & Beth Ann: Peter Sengwa

SUMMER

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ASPEN
SEASONS
SUMMER
2006



OCCUPATIONAL
HAZARDS
WRITTEN BY: VINCE HERNANDEZ
PENCILED BY: KHARI EVANS
INKED BY: NICK NIX
COLORED BY: BETH SOTELO



CONTRARY TO UNPOPULAR
BELIEF, ONLY TWO INDIVIDUALS
CAN LAY CLAIM TO BEING MY
PROFESSIONAL COMPETITORS.

MY LINE OF WORK CONSISTS OF A
VAST ARRAY OF SERVICES PROVIDED
TO MY CLIENTS. COMPLEX ENGINEERING,
COVERT RECONNAISSANCE, EVEN
CLEANUP-- IF NECESSARY.

SERVICES THAT
REQUIRE MORE
THAN A LITTLE...
CREATIVITY.

THIS IS THE REALITY OF MY
OCCUPATION. OCCUPATION
BEING A TERM I HAVE
REDEFINED.

COUNTLESS LIVES ARE LOST
UNDER THE BANNER OF THE
WORD. NATIONS CRUMBLLED
UNDER THE WEIGHT OF THEIR
NECESSITY FOR POWER.

YET WHY ELIMINATE THOSE
YOU SEEK TO DOMINATE?
WHEN YOU CAN EXPLOIT
THE RESOURCES TO WHICH
THEY PROVIDE?

MR. ABEL,
SIR?



5X YEARS EARLIER

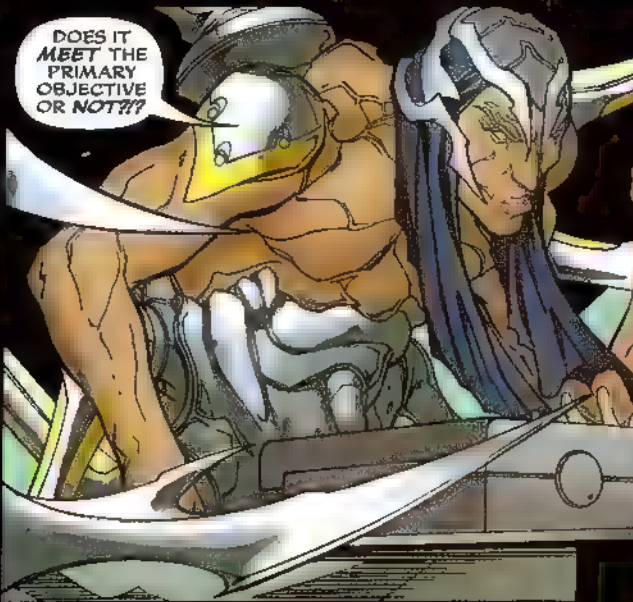
YES.
WHAT IS IT
MAEMOTO?



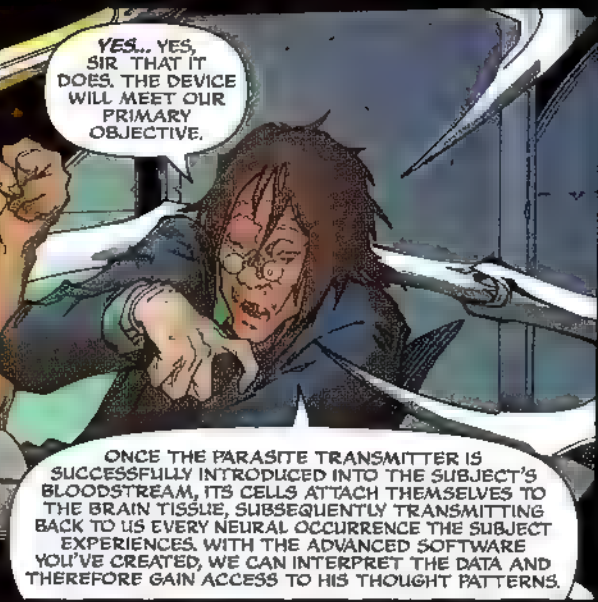
WHAT DID THE
FINAL ANALYSIS
CONCLUDE?



QUITE HONESTLY SIR...
THE PROTOTYPE
CONTAINS A NUMBER
OF SIDE EFFECTS
THAT ARE RATHER...
GRIM--SO TO SPEAK.
DEMENTIA, A
PROCLIVITY TOWARDS
VIOLENCE, EVEN
SEIZURES OF THE
BRAIN--



DOES IT
MEET THE
PRIMARY
OBJECTIVE
OR NOT???



YES... YES,
SIR THAT IT
DOES. THE DEVICE
WILL MEET OUR
PRIMARY
OBJECTIVE.

ONCE THE PARASITE TRANSMITTER IS
SUCCESSFULLY INTRODUCED INTO THE SUBJECT'S
BLOODSTREAM, ITS CELLS ATTACH THEMSELVES
TO THE BRAIN TISSUE, SUBSEQUENTLY TRANSMITTING
BACK TO US EVERY NEURAL OCCURRENCE THE SUBJECT
EXPERIENCES. WITH THE ADVANCED SOFTWARE
YOU'VE CREATED, WE CAN INTERPRET THE DATA AND
THEREFORE GAIN ACCESS TO HIS THOUGHT PATTERNS.



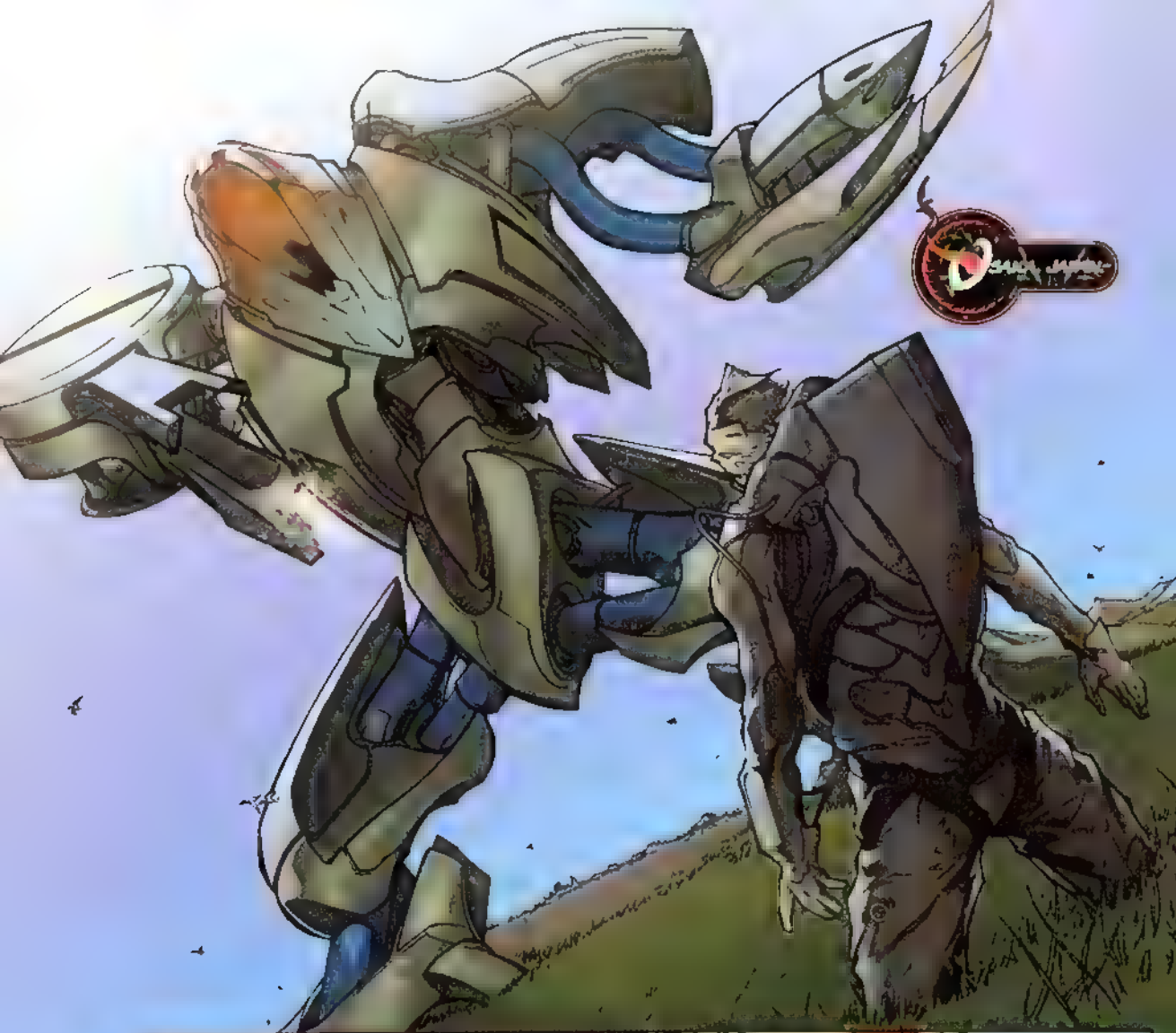
CLICK



THE
PARASITE WILL
QUITE LITERALLY
OFFER A WINDOW
INTO THE
SUBJECT'S
MIND.



THEN
PREPARE THE
MEANS OF
TRANSMISSION
FOR THE FIRST
SUBJECT.

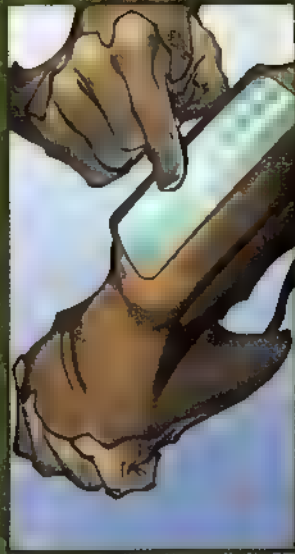


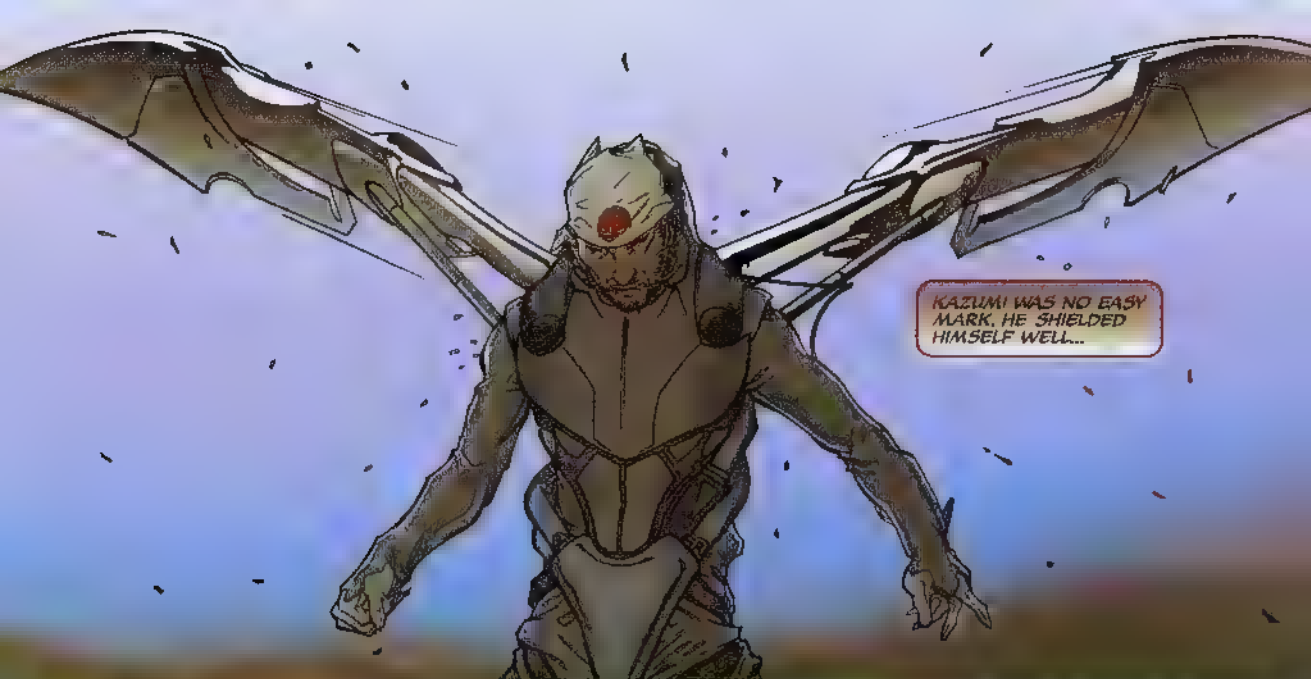
THE MAN KNOWN ONLY AS KAZUMI HAD PIQUED MY CURIOSITY FOR SOME TIME

BORN A GENIUS, KAZUMI WAS NOT SATISFIED MERELY STRIDING AHEAD OF THE PACK. HIS STATE-OF THE ART FEATS OF ENGINEERING REFLECTED THE ENDLESS BOUNDS OF HIS BRILLIANT MIND. FABRICATIONS THAT COULD NOT BE DENIED BY EVEN THE SHREWDEST MINDS-- OR THE DEEPEST POCKETS.



THIS BECAME THE REASON I COULD NOT ALLOW HIS CONTINUED PROSPERITY.

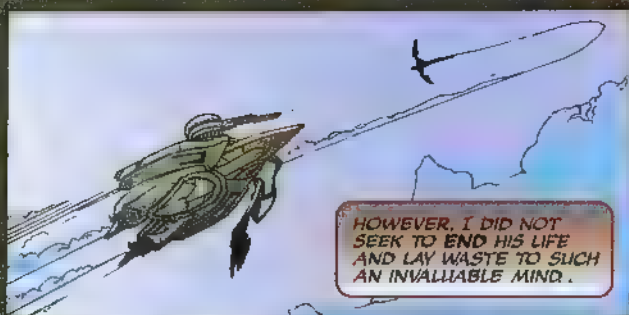




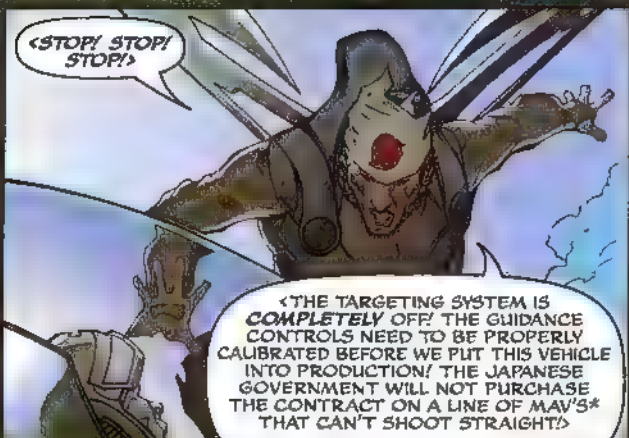
KAZUMI WAS NO EASY
MARK. HE SHIELDED
HIMSELF WELL...



...AN ESSENTIAL TOOL IF
ONE WISHES TO SUSTAIN LIFE
IN OUR VOLATILE INDUSTRY.

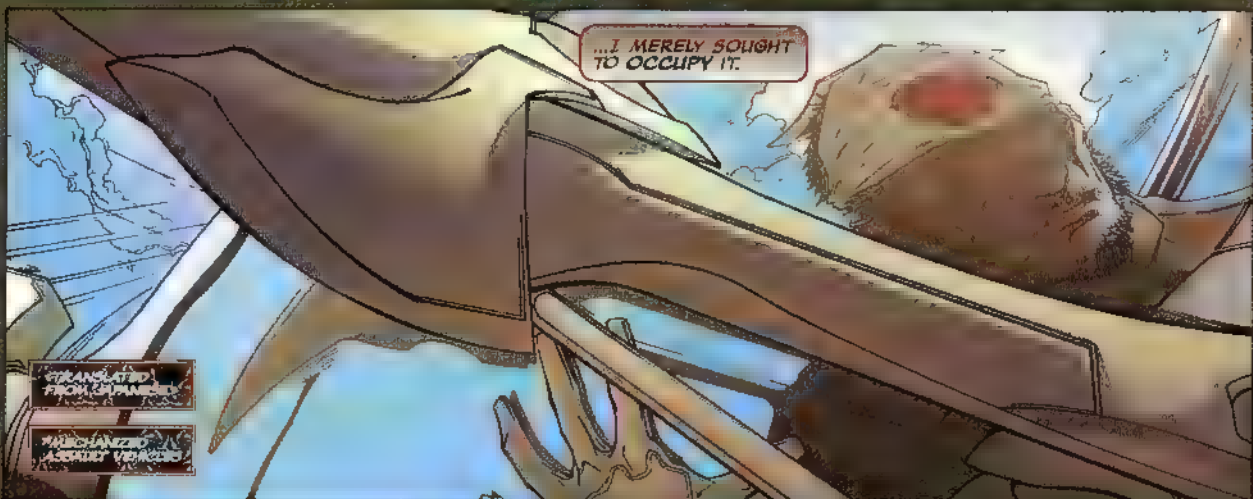


HOWEVER, I DID NOT
SEEK TO END HIS LIFE
AND LAY WASTE TO SUCH
AN INVALUABLE MIND.



«STOP! STOP!
STOP!»

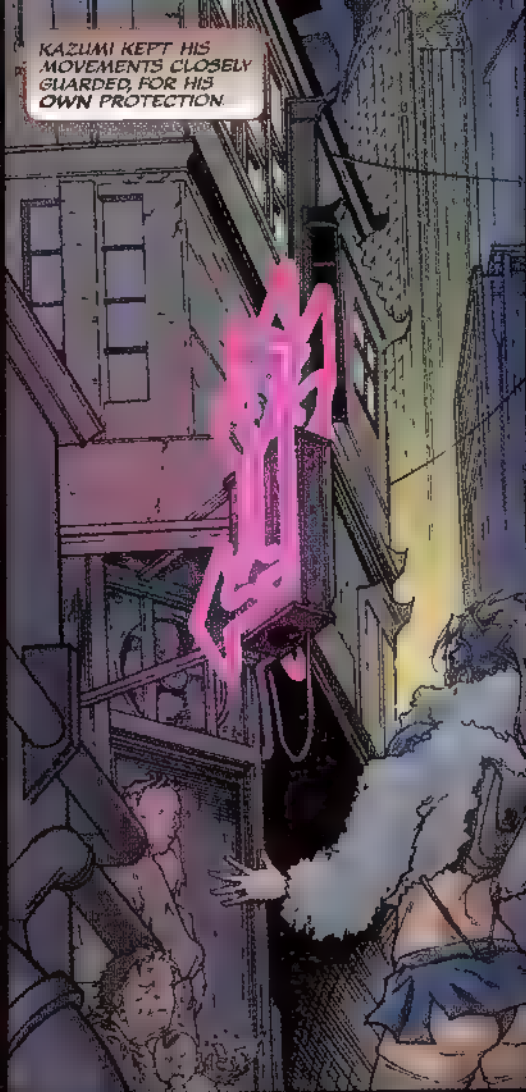
«THE TARGETING SYSTEM IS
COMPLETELY OFF! THE GUIDANCE
CONTROLS NEED TO BE PROPERLY
CALIBRATED BEFORE WE PUT THIS VEHICLE
INTO PRODUCTION! THE JAPANESE
GOVERNMENT WILL NOT PURCHASE
THE CONTRACT ON A LINE OF MAV'S*
THAT CAN'T SHOOT STRAIGHT!»



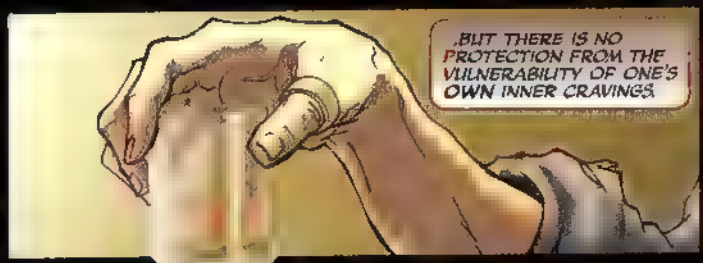
...I MERELY SOUGHT
TO OCCUPY IT.

TRANSLATED
FROM JAPANESE

RECHARGED
ASSAULT VEHICLE



KAZUMI KEPT HIS
MOVEMENTS CLOSELY
GUARDED, FOR HIS
OWN PROTECTION.



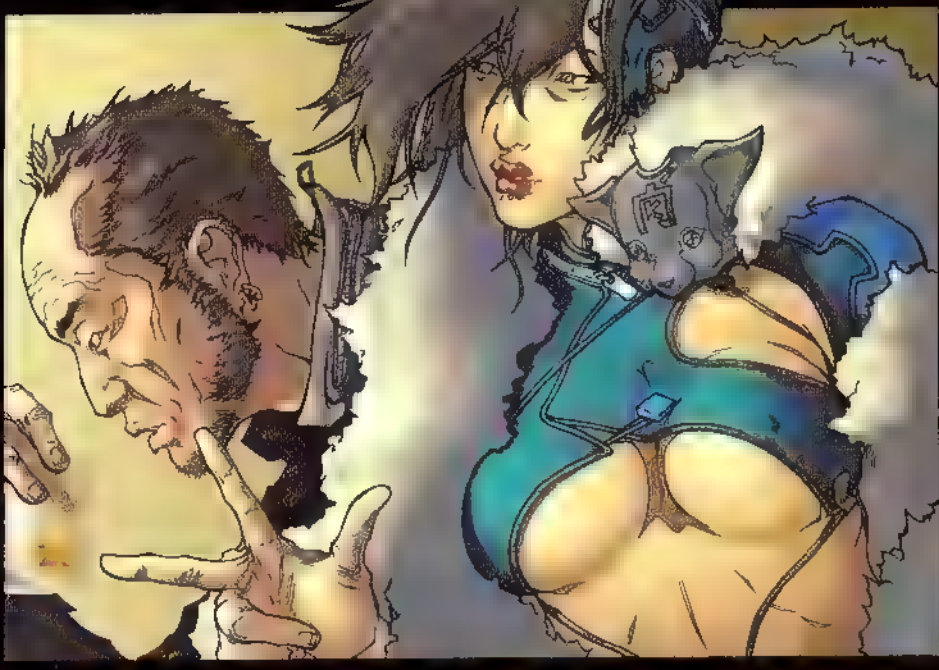
BUT THERE IS NO
PROTECTION FROM THE
VULNERABILITY OF ONE'S
OWN INNER CRAVINGS.



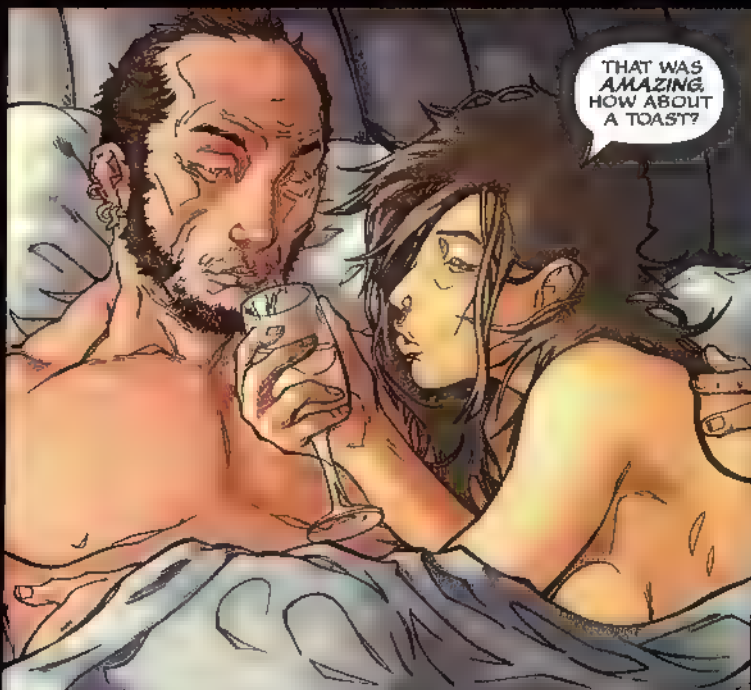
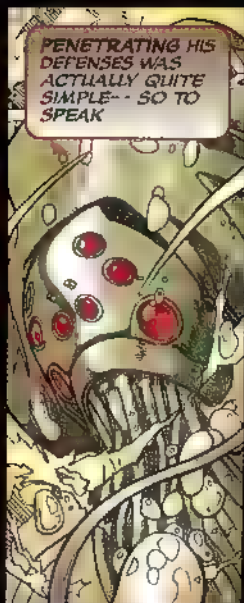
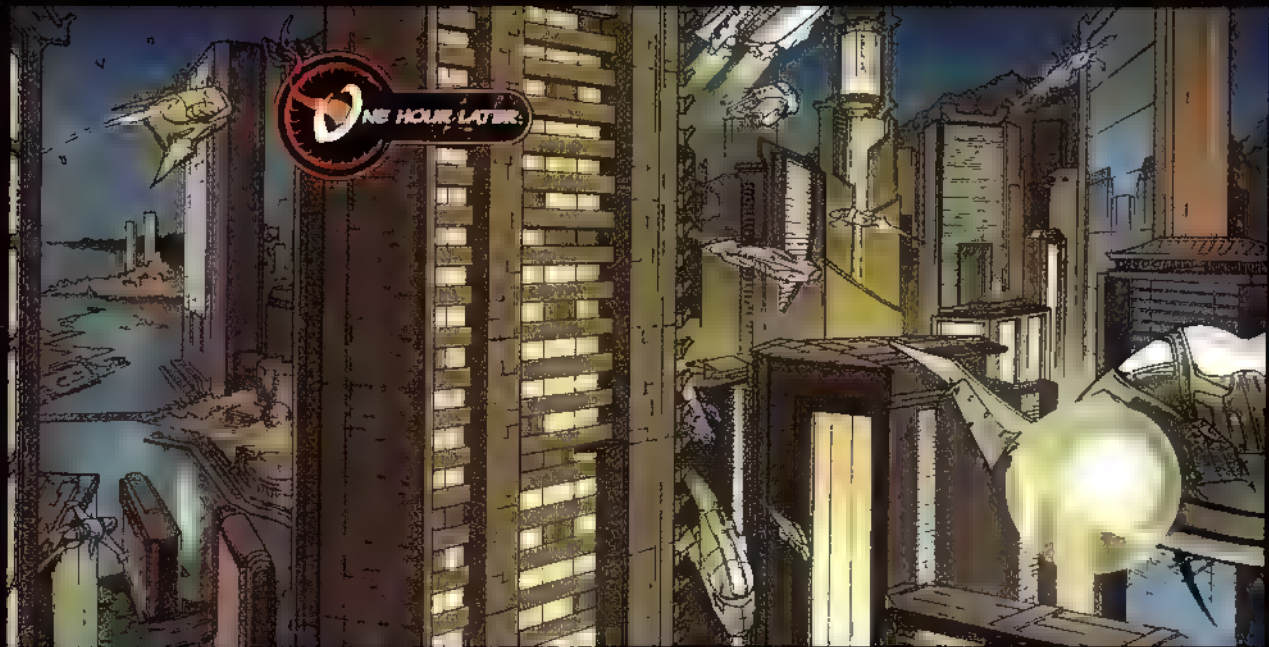
EVERYBODY HAS A WEAKNESS.
KAZUMI WAS NO EXCEPTION.
HE AFFORDED HIMSELF TWO
SUCH VULNERABILITIES. ONE
VICE HE FED OFTEN, THE
ALCOHOL SERVING TO PUSH
BACK DOWN THE DEMONS
BUILDING GOLEMS OF WAR
CAN INDUCE.

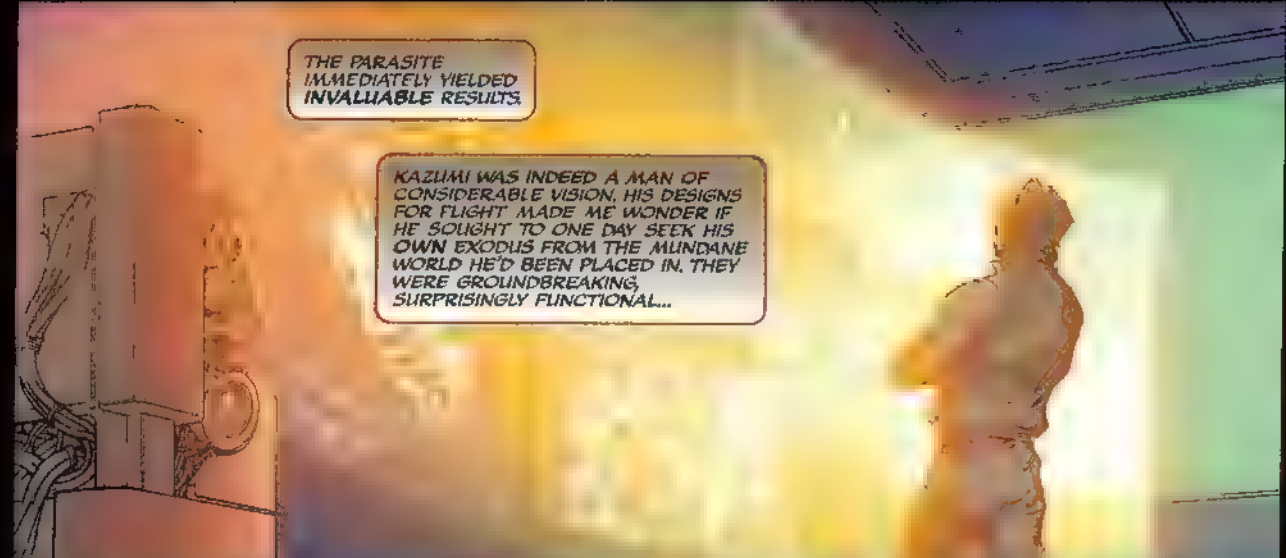


THE OTHER VICE
WAS MUCH MORE...



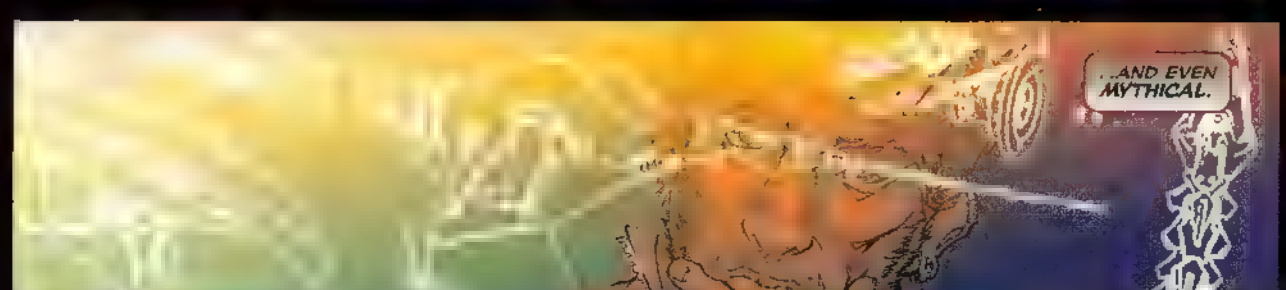
...INSTINCTUAL.





THE PARASITE
IMMEDIATELY YIELDED
INVALUABLE RESULTS.

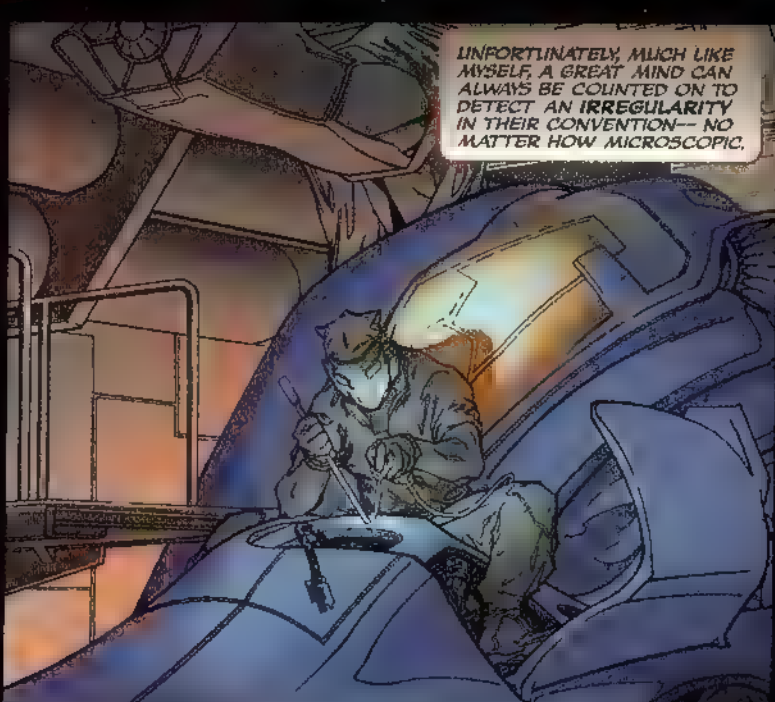
KAZUMI WAS INDEED A MAN OF
CONSIDERABLE VISION. HIS DESIGNS
FOR FLIGHT MADE ME WONDER IF
HE SOUGHT TO ONE DAY SEEK HIS
OWN EXODUS FROM THE MUNDANE
WORLD HE'D BEEN PLACED IN. THEY
WERE GROUNDBREAKING,
SURPRISINGLY FUNCTIONAL...



...AND EVEN
MYTHICAL.



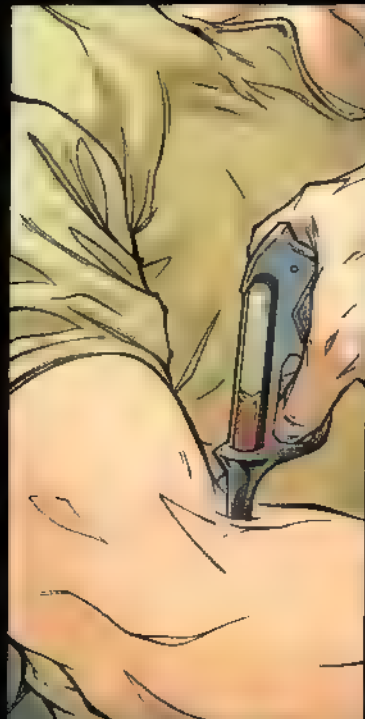
IT WAS REFRESHING TO
SIPHON HIS KNOWLEDGE,
AND COMPARE HIS
CONCEPTS WITH MY OWN.



UNFORTUNATELY, MUCH LIKE
MYSELF, A GREAT MIND CAN
ALWAYS BE COUNTED ON TO
DETECT AN IRREGULARITY
IN THEIR CONVENTION— NO
MATTER HOW MICROSCOPIC.



IT WAS ONLY A MATTER
OF TIME BEFORE HE BEGAN
TO SEARCH WITHIN AND
PUT THE PIECES TOGETHER.



THE PARASITE'S SIDE EFFECTS OVER TIME
PLAGUED BOTH HIS
MIND AND BODY.

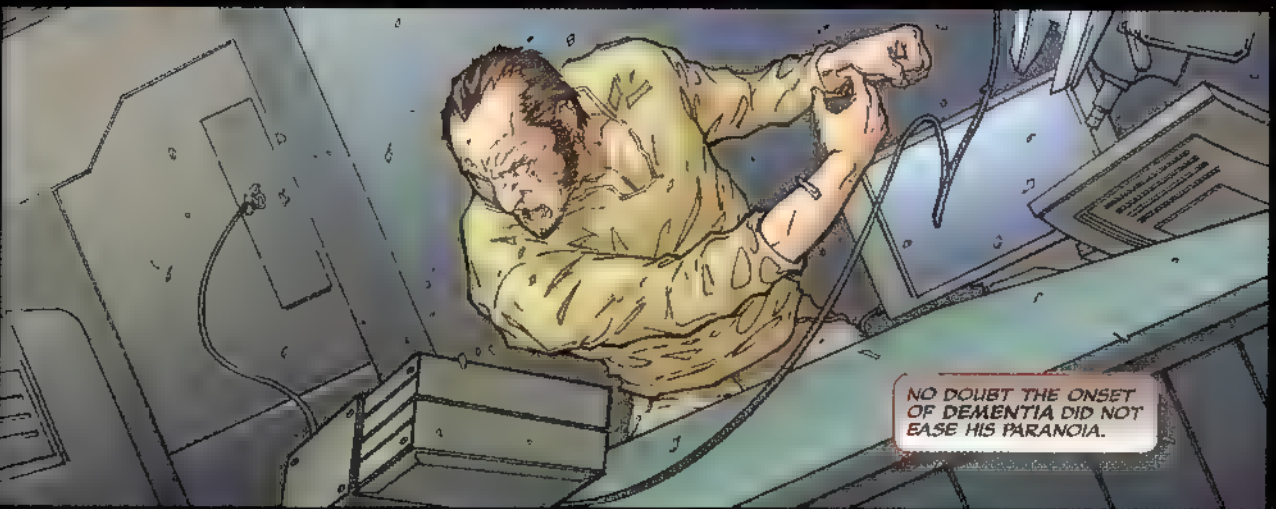
I FORESAW THIS INEVITABILITY
AND UNDERSTOOD THERE
WOULD BE NECESSARY
COLLATERAL FOR THE
OPERATION TO BE A SUCCESS.



NATURALLY...



KAZUMI DIDN'T
CONCUR WITH MY
RATIONALIZATION.



NO DOUBT THE ONSET
OF DEMENTIA DID NOT
EASE HIS PARANOIA.

YOU!!

YOU THOUGHT
YOU COULD GET
AWAY WITH IT?

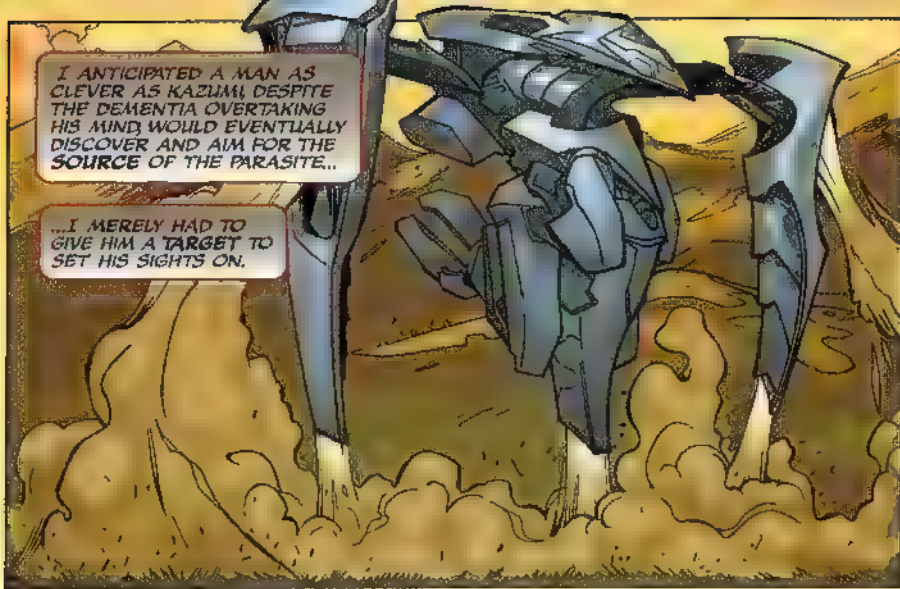
YOU THOUGHT
I WOULDN'T
DISCOVER WHAT
YOU'VE DONE???

PLEASE!
PLEASE!! HE
PROMISED TO CURE
MY ILLNESS, TO CURE
ME! HE SAID IT
WOULDN'T HURT
YOU!!!

GIVE ME HIS
NAME AND I'LL
MAKE THIS
PAINLESS AS
WELL.

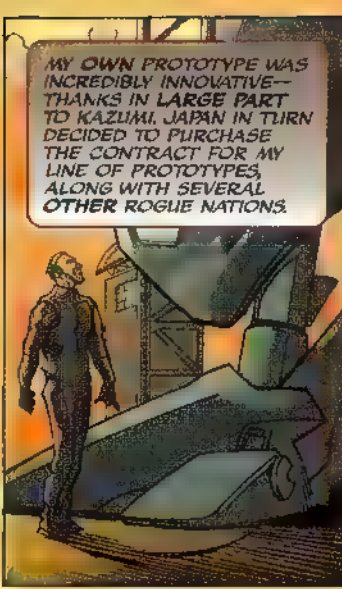
MAEMOTO
HIS NAME IS
MAEMOTO!!

THEN TO
RANDOM
ENCOUNTERS!

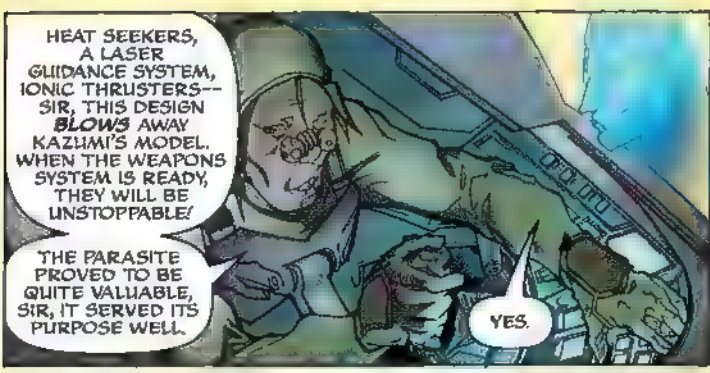


I ANTICIPATED A MAN AS CLEVER AS KAZUMI, DESPITE THE DEMENTIA OVERTAKING HIS MIND, WOULD EVENTUALLY DISCOVER AND AIM FOR THE SOURCE OF THE PARASITE...

...I MERELY HAD TO GIVE HIM A TARGET TO SET HIS SIGHTS ON.



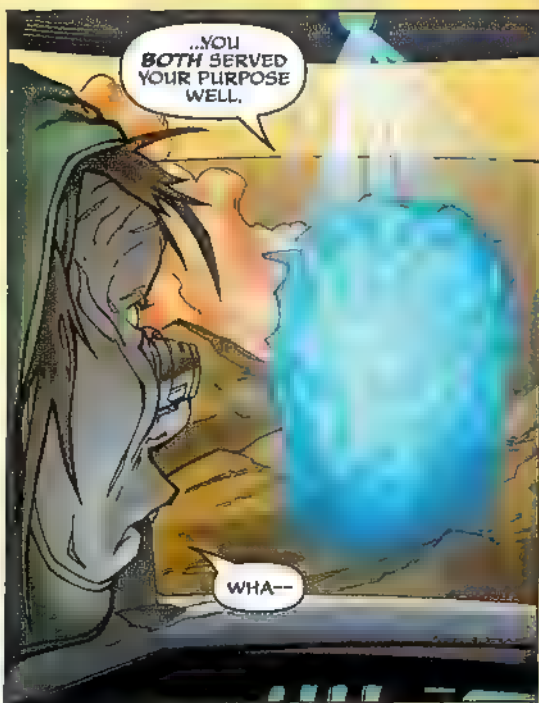
MY OWN PROTOTYPE WAS INCREDIBLY INNOVATIVE—THANKS IN LARGE PART TO KAZUMI. JAPAN IN TURN DECIDED TO PURCHASE THE CONTRACT FOR MY LINE OF PROTOTYPES, ALONG WITH SEVERAL OTHER ROGUE NATIONS.



HEAT SEEKERS, A LASER GUIDANCE SYSTEM, IONIC THRUSTERS—SIR, THIS DESIGN **BLOWS AWAY** KAZUMI'S MODEL. WHEN THE WEAPONS SYSTEM IS READY, THEY WILL BE UNSTOPPABLE!

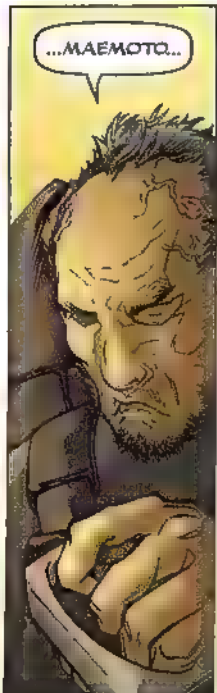
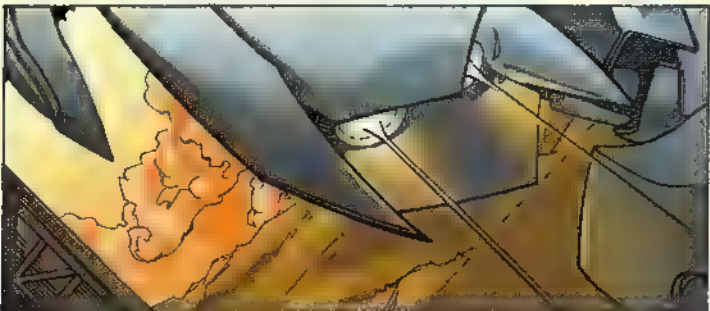
THE PARASITE PROVED TO BE QUITE VALUABLE, SIR, IT SERVED ITS PURPOSE WELL.

YES.



...YOU BOTH SERVED YOUR PURPOSE WELL.

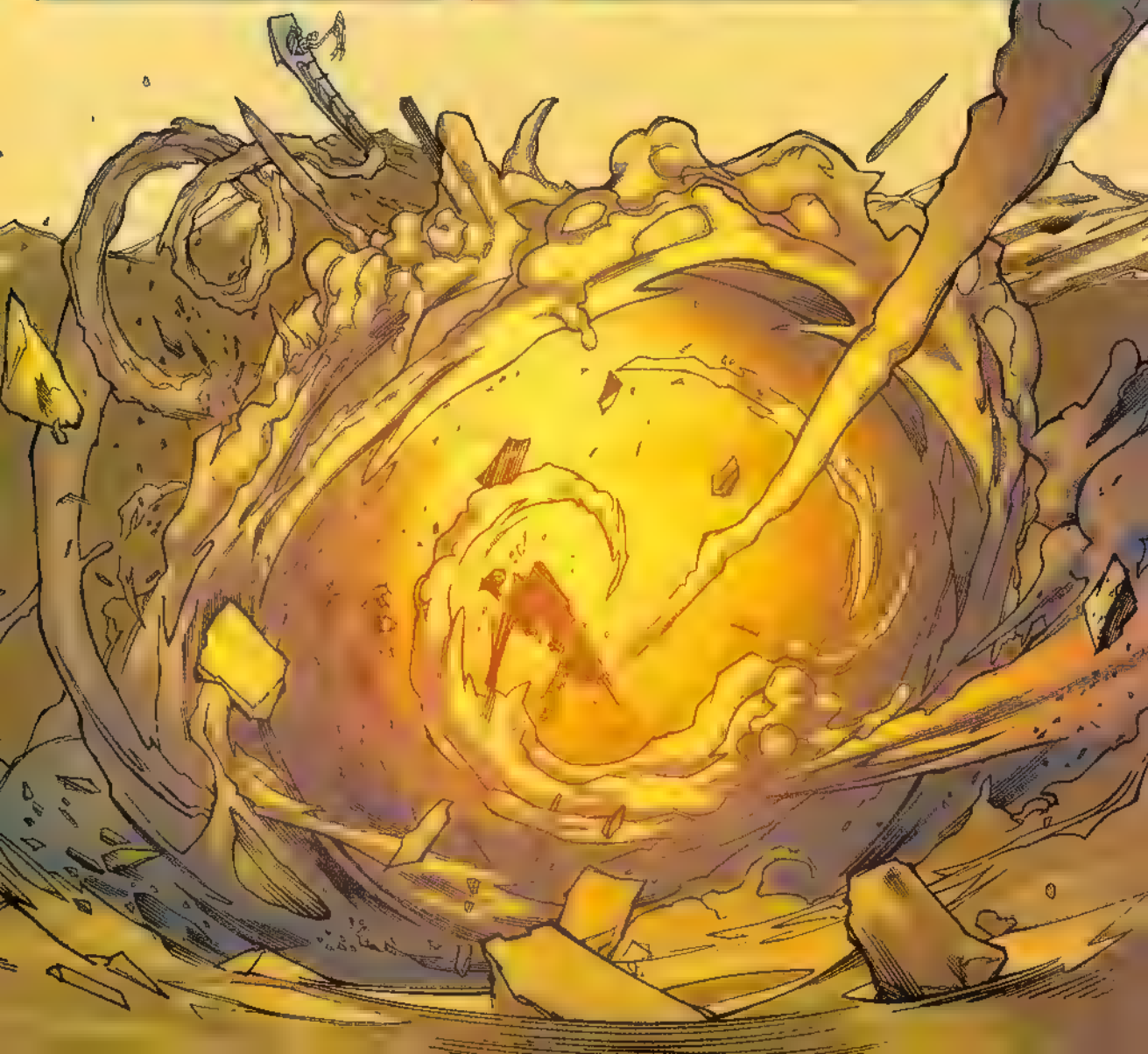
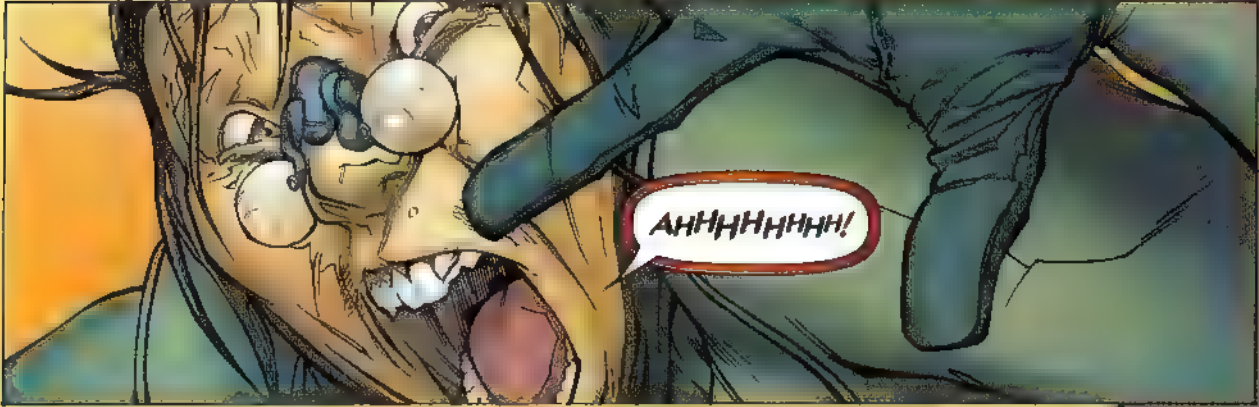
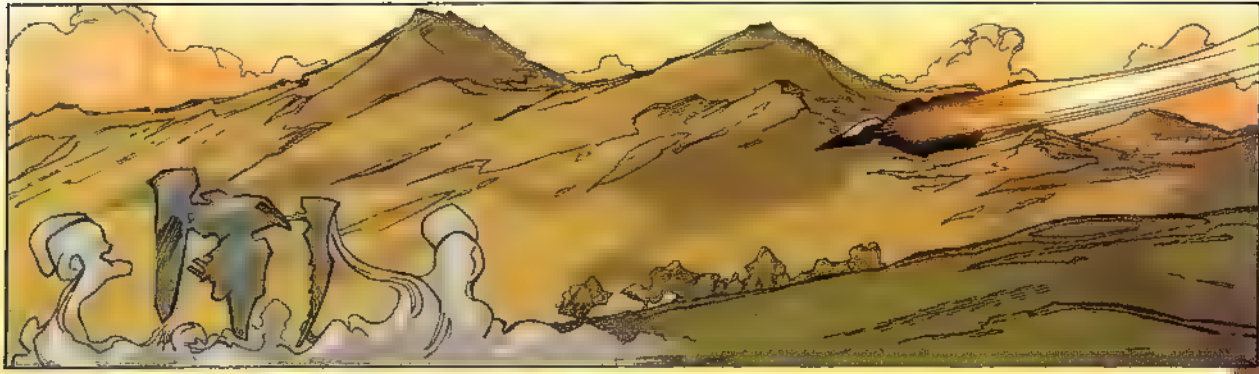
WHA—



...MAEMOTO...



MAEMOTO!!!



ULTIMATELY, MY OCCUPATIONAL
OBJECTIVE WAS MET, ALTHOUGH
NOT WITHOUT ITS SHARE OF
HINDRANCES.

MR. ABEL,
SIR?

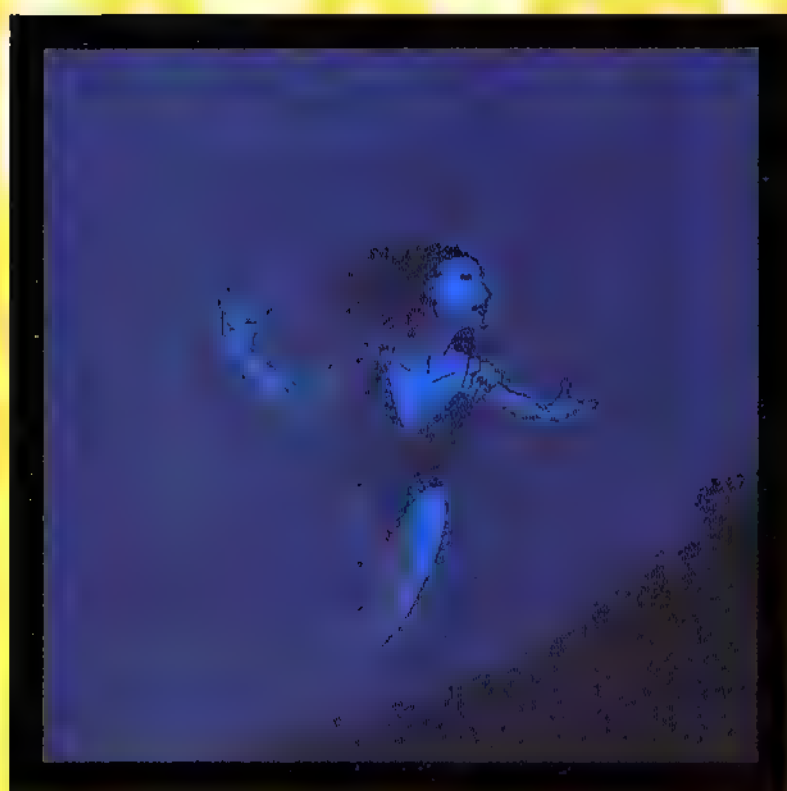
SHOULD I
PREPARE THE
STAGE TWO
PARASITE FOR
DEPLOYMENT?

THE SETBACKS I
ENCOUNTERED IN
THE FIRST STAGE OF
OPERATION GAVE ME
PRECIOUS TACTICAL
INSIGHT, THEREBY
UPGRADING THE
PARASITE'S FEATURES
IN STAGE TWO...

...GIVEN THAT OUR STAGE
TWO SUBJECT MAY
PRESENT A BIT MORE
OF A... CHALLENGE.

THE END... FOR NOW.

ASPEN
SEASONS
SUMMER
2006



BLUE
STORY AND ARTWORK BY:
PETER STEIGERWALD



WELCOME TRAVELER,
SEEKER OF KNOWLEDGE

WINDY HILLS

ALAN WILSON



WHO AM I?

YOU JUST CALLED ME BY NAME.
I'M ASPEN MATTHEWS. I'VE
BEEN SENT HERE TO SABA TO
LOOK FOR A PROFESSOR TOSK.

HE IS DEAD.

HE HAS NO
MARKER.

WHEN DID HE...
DID HE DIE IN THE
ATTACK ON SABA?

NO, LIKE SO MANY OF THE BLUE,
HE WAS DYING LONG BEFORE
ANY HUMAN BOMB FELL. HE WAS
BLIND. THE ATTACK SIMPLY
OPENED HIS EYES AND HE WAS
ABLE TO SEE THAT HE WAS DEAD.

HE SAW HE WAS DEAD?

YOU'RE SPEAKING IN RIDDLES. I AM
HERE BY OLD INVITATION TO SPEAK TO
A PROFESSOR TOSK. THIS IS WHERE
HIS SCHOOL WAS. YET HERE I FIND
ONLY YOU--WHO TELLS ME TOSK MAY
OR MAY NOT BE DEAD. NOW DO YOU
KNOW THIS? IS HE ALIVE OR ISN'T HE?

WHO ARE YOU?

WE HAVE OPENED A CIRCLE. A TALE MUST
BE TOLD BEFORE IT ENCLOSES AND YOU
KNOW MY NAME AND MY PURPOSE.

NO OFFENSE, BUT I HAVE COME A
LONG WAY. I DON'T HAVE TIME
FOR RIDDLES, PLOTS AND CIRCLES.

YOU HAVE TIME. FOR I HOLD KNOWLEDGE
THAT YOU HAVE BEEN SEEKING. YOU WILL STAY
AND YOU WILL HEAR WHAT I HAVE TO SAY.

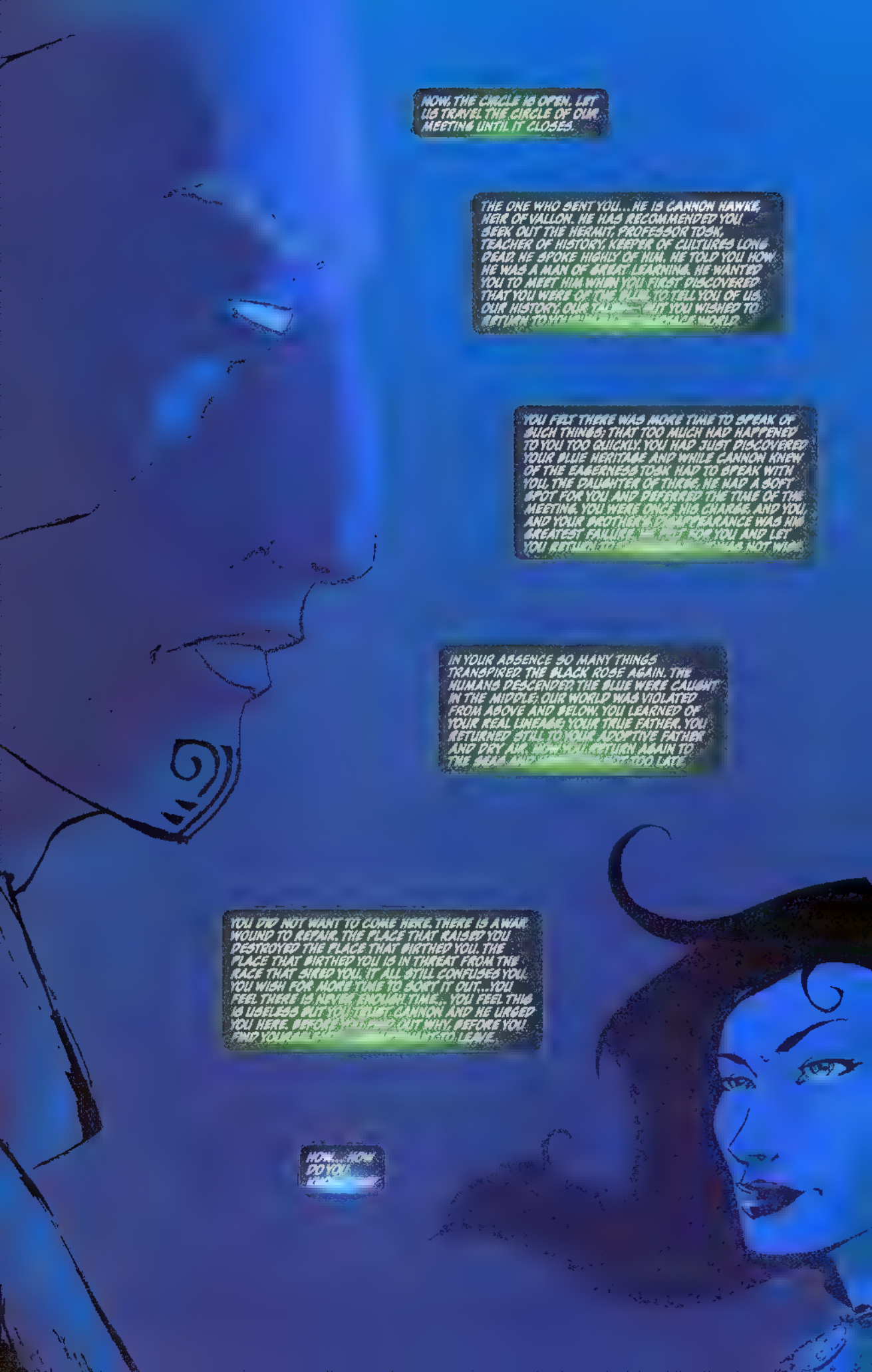
I WILL STAY? WHY?
DON'T TRUST THIS.
I DON'T KNOW YOU.

YOU ARE GIVEN TO
DISTRUST. IT IS YOUR
NATURE. YOU ARE A
SCIENTIST. YOU ARE
A LEARNER. THE
MYSTERIOUS CALL
TO YOU BECAUSE
YOU LISTEN.

NOW I AM YOUR
MYSTERY AND YOU
ARE TRAPPED LIKE
A PRISONER.

IT IS TRUE.

YOU WILL STAY UNTIL
YOUR CURIOSITY IS
SATISFIED.



NOW THE CIRCLE IS OPEN. LET
US TRAVEL THE CIRCLE OF OUR
MEETING UNTIL IT CLOSES.

THE ONE WHO SENT YOU... HE IS CANNON HAWKE,
NEIR OF VALLON. HE HAS RECOMMENDED YOU
SEEK OUT THE HERMIT, PROFESSOR TOAK,
TEACHER OF HISTORY, KEEPER OF CULTURES LONG
DEAD. HE SPOKE HIGHLY OF HIM. HE TOLD YOU HOW
HE WAS A MAN OF GREAT LEARNING. HE WANTED
YOU TO MEET HIM WHEN YOU FIRST DISCOVERED
THAT YOU WERE OF THE BLUE. TO TELL YOU OF US,
OUR HISTORY, OUR FUTURE. BUT YOU WISHED TO
RETURN TO YOUR OWN WORLD.

YOU FELT THERE WAS MORE TIME TO SPEAK OF
SUCH THINGS; THAT TOO MUCH HAD HAPPENED
TO YOU TOO QUICKLY. YOU HAD JUST DISCOVERED
YOUR BLUE HERITAGE AND WHILE CANNON KNEW
OF THE EAGERNESS TOAK HAD TO BREAK WITH
YOU, THE DAUGHTER OF THING, HE HAD A SOFT
SPOT FOR YOU AND DEFERRED THE TIME OF THE
MEETING. YOU WERE ONCE HIS CHARGE AND YOU,
AND YOUR BROTHER'S, APPEARANCE WAS HIS
GREATEST FAILURE. HE WAITED FOR YOU AND LET
YOU RETURN TO YOUR OWN WORLD. IT WAS NOT WISE.

IN YOUR ABSENCE SO MANY THINGS
TRANSPIRED. THE BLACK ROSE AGAIN. THE
HUMANS DESCENDED. THE BLUE WERE CAUGHT
IN THE MIDDLE. OUR WORLD WAS VIOLATED
FROM ABOVE AND BELOW. YOU LEARNED OF
YOUR REAL LINEAGE. YOUR TRUE FATHER. YOU
RETURNED STILL TO YOUR ADOPTIVE FATHER
AND DRY AIR. WHEN YOU RETURN AGAIN TO
THE BEACH AND THE CIRCLE IS TOO LATE.

YOU DID NOT WANT TO COME HERE. THERE IS A WAR
WOUND TO REPAIR. THE PLACE THAT RAISED YOU
DESTROYED THE PLACE THAT BIRTHED YOU. THE
PLACE THAT BIRTHED YOU IS IN THREAT FROM THE
RACE THAT SAVED YOU. IT ALL STILL CONFUSES YOU.
YOU WISH FOR MORE TIME TO SORT IT OUT... YOU
FEEL THERE IS NEVER ENOUGH TIME... YOU FEEL THIS
IS USELESS BUT YOU MUST. CANNON AND HE URGED
YOU HERE. BEFORE HE DIED. DO IT WHY, BEFORE YOU
FIND YOUR OWN WAY. YOU MUST SO, LEAVE.

NOW... NOW
DO YOU
LEAVE

THE BLUE TELLS
ME THIS

SINCE MY FIRST MEETING YOU
HAVE NOT QUESTIONED MY
ABILITY TO SHARE WORDS WITH
YOU. I SIMPLY COULD IT WAS
NATURAL AND EASY FOR YOU TO
REPLY—NOW, IT IS NO SIMPLE
THAT YOU DID IT AUTOMATICALLY
BUT NOT FOR ME.

NONE OF OUR PEOPLE DO IT. WE SPEAK
THROUGH AIR...LIKE HUMANS. BUT THE
AIR IS WEAK AND IN LIVING IN IT WE
HAVE BECOME LIKE THEM...WEAK. TO
SPEAK THROUGH AIR ONE MUST
VIBRATE CHORDS IN ONE'S THROAT. BUT
IN THE WATER, WE CAN HEAR AND WE
NEED NOT SPEAK.

WATER, ESPECIALLY SALT WATER, CONDUCTS
ELECTRICITY FLUIDLY. THOUGHT SLIDES
AMIDST THE SEAS AS ELOQUENTLY AS IT
FLIES IN AIR. IN THE BLUE YOU CAN DIRECT
THOUGHT, SHARE THOUGHT AND OBTAIN
THOUGHT. I KNOW YOUR HAND AND IF YOU
OPEN YOUR MIND, YOU KNOW MINE.

THE OCEAN IS ALL ONE MIND? NO SECRETS TO
THOSE WHO CAN READ ITS CURRENTS. A LIVING
WORLD SHARING THE COLLECTED KNOWLEDGE
OF OCTILLIONS OF LIFE FORMS—WE ONCE
KNEW THIS—AND WE WERE POWERFUL.

THE IRONY IS, TOSK COULD NOT HAVE
TOLD YOU THIS. YOU ARE SWIMMING IN
MORE KNOWLEDGE THAN HE COULD
HAVE EVER PROVIDED. THE SEAS HAVE
A FAR LONGER MEMORY THAN EVEN
THE OLDEST OF US.

BUT REACH OUT. NOW, FIND
THE KNOWLEDGE YOU SEEK.

FOR HIM, TOSK

WERE

THE BODY OF TOSK,
THOUGH HE IS DEAD,
CANNOT BE BURIED AND
HE CANNOT BE SAVED.

FOR ME

I WEAR HIS FACE. I HAVE HIS MEMORIES. I
SWIM WITH HIS BODY. BUT I AM FREE OF HIS
SHACKLES. HE WAS A MAN OF AN OLD
CIVILIZATION, ONE THAT HAD FORGOTTEN ITSELF
EVEN AS WELL REMEMBERED MEN RECOUNTED
ITS GLORIES. BUT AS THE EARTH CHARGED AND
HISGLES OF HUMANITY STROVE THROUGH ALL THAT
HE KNEW TO PROTECT HIS PEOPLE, HE THOUGHT HE
CHERISHED HIS PEOPLE. BUT HE HAD BEEN
DYING FOR YEARS. HIS PEOPLE WERE A WEAK
PEOPLE.

WHEN THE ATTACKS CAME, HE HIDDEN
ALONE IN THE DEEPEST BASEMENT
LIBRARY. A COWARD, HE KNEW, BUT
SAFE FROM THE WEAPONS AND ARMS
FROM THE JEALOUSY AND FEAR OF
HUMANITY. BATHED AROUND HIM WERE
THE ANCIENT WORKS, PRICELESS SCROLLS
AND ARTIFACTS, MORE VALUABLE THAN THE VERY
MEN SEEKING TO DESTROY THEM.
THE FIRST OF THE ATTACKS.

HE WAS AFRAID, YES, FOR HIS LIFE,
YET MORE FOR THE MANUSCRIPTS.
AFRAID WITH A FOOL'S IRONY THAT
THE WATER WOULD RUSH IN AND
DESTROY ALL THIS. THIS HISTORY,
THIS RECORD OF THE TIME OF HIS
PEOPLE. THIS WAS HIS ONLY HOPE.
MORE THAN HIS OWN LIFE.

THE WATER'S
EXPLOSIONS
SHATTERED THE
STRUCTURES AND
DROVE HIM
DOWN.

WATERS WOULD HAVE FALLEN
FROM HIS BLIND EYES HAD NOT
THE SEA RECLAIMED THE ROOM.
BUT TEARS WOULD HAVE BEEN
IN VAIN. FOR TOSK WAS WISELY
NAMED. HE WAS A FOOL.

THESE DOCUMENTS
WERE WRITTEN BY A
PEOPLE WHO LIVED
IN THE PAST.

WHO WERE
THEY?

...THEY HAD NO
FACE AND WASH
AWAY. INSTEAD IT
BECAME A PART OF ME.

ALIVE AGAIN AFTER
THOUSANDS OF YEARS
IN DEATH.

THE WAY OUT WAS SEALED. HE DID NOT KNOW IT, BUT THIS WAS TO BE TOSK'S CRYSTAL. HE HOPED FOR, BUT WOULD NOT BELIEVE.

DEEP IN THE COLLAPSED STRUCTURE, HE FORGOT HIS DOOM AMONG THE OLD TEXTS. EXCITED AND EMPOWERED BY THE NEW OLD TEXTS, HE READ.

WHEN AGAIN I FINALLY TASTED FREE BLUE, MY RESCUERS DID NOT KNOW ME. THEY ASKED ME MY NAME. ONLY ONE WORD FILLED MY MIND.

...MAGACAS.

TOSK, THE POOL, WAS FINALLY DEAD. WAS BORN MAGACAS, AN ANCIENT WORD MEANING THE DESTINY OF THE FREE. IT WAS MAGACAS THAT LED HIM TO CLIMB CHARNARNAY AND ASCEND FROM THE SLAVERY OF THE BLACK. IT WAS MAGACAS THAT LED THE FIRST TO FOLLOW HIM INTO THE BLUE. IT WILL BE MAGACAS THAT WILL RETURN US TO WHAT WE SHOULD NEVER HAVE LEFT. WE WERE.

THIS IS WHERE I WAS BORN.

WHAT?

OUR BIRTHPLACE.

A SIMPLE ANSWER...

WHAT IS THE BLUE?

OK, THIS IS ALL EDUCATIONAL. WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH ME?

YOU MEAN OUR HOME?

I'M NOT SURE WHAT YOU'RE GETTING AT. OUT THERE IS THE BLUE. THE REGION OF SEAWHERE THE LIGHT REACHES AND MAKES THE WATER BLUE. AS A MARINE BIOLOGIST WE CALL IT THE EUPHOTIC ZONE. BENEATH IT IS THE APHOTIC ZONE OR THE APMOTIC ZONE.

YES, THE BLACK, THE REALM OF YOUR FATHER AND THE SECRET FEAR AND BIRTHPLACE OF OUR PEOPLE. YOU SEE, YOU ARE NOT BLUE, BUT OF THE BLACK. AS WELL, YOU ARE SOMETHING THAT HAS NOT BEEN HERE BEFORE.

WHAT?

SO...IT IS CRUCIAL TO OUR ENTIRE WORLD THAT YOU KNOW WHAT YOU ARE. I CANNOT TELL YOU OF THE BLACK. THEIR WATER IS DEEP BUT I CAN TELL YOU OF THE BLUE. THE BLUE IS NOT JUST A 'WHAT' BUT A 'WHO'...AND IT'S CRUCIAL THAT YOU KNOW THIS BECAUSE YOU ARE ALL OF THE BLUE. HAVE YOU?

FOR IN YOU MANY HAVE PLACED THEIR HOPES. TOSK INVITED YOU BECAUSE HE WAS CURIOUS ABOUT YOU, THE LOST CHILD...ONCE GONE, NOW REAPPEARED. A DAUGHTER OF THREE, A POWER TO BE FEARED. HE WANTED YOU TO KNOW ALL HE COULD TEACH YOU. THE LESSONS YOU SHOULD KNOW.

I AM NOT CURIOUS ABOUT YOU. I CARE NOT FOR THE LESSONS YOU MISSED. THE LESSONS WE TEACH OUR CHILDREN ARE BUT A SHADOW OF WHAT THEY SHOULD KNOW. THE LITTLE KNOWLEDGE I HAVE SHARED HERE IS A THOUSANDFOLD MORE POWERFUL THAN ANY TEACHING OF A SCHOOL. INSTEAD, I SEEK A REVELATION FROM YOU. BUT BEFORE I ASK THE BIRTH QUESTION, I HAVE A SIMPLER ONE. BUT ONE THAT MAY BE MUCH MORE IMPORTANT TO YOU.

I HAVE ALREADY TOLD YOU THAT KNOWLEDGE IS ALWAYS WITH YOU.

IT IS OUT THERE.

THE BLUE IS YOU.

IT IS EVERYTHING, YET IT IS EMPTY. IT IS LOST, BECAUSE WE DO NOT KNOW OURSELVES. WE HAVE FORGOTTEN THE VERY BEAUTY OF IT.

THE ANSWER YOU GAVE IS TAUGHT TO EVERY SCHOOLFRY RAISER. ARE YOU SURPRISED TO KNOW THE KNOWLEDGE YOU LEARNED ON LAND IS THE SAME HERE IN THE SEA? YOU SHOULD NOT BE. IT IS WHY I SAID OUR CHILDREN ARE WEAK. IT IS WHY WE MUST REACH THE SURFACE. IT HAS BEEN THIS WAY SINCE THE BEGINNING.

WE CALL OURSELVES BLUE, BUT WE DEFINE OURSELVES BY A RELATIONSHIP TO DRY LAND. OUR CHILDREN SEEK REPELLION BY SWIMMING FOR THE SURFACE. THEY WANT MUCH TO REACH THE SURFACE, TO SMILE AND TALK.



WE NAME OUR CHILDREN WITH HUMAN WORDS. MANY TIMES IGNORANT OF THEIR MEANINGS. WE COMMUNICATE IN ENGLISH AND OTHER HUMAN LANGUAGES. WE FORGET OUR TRUE TRADITION. WE PLAY AS IF WE WERE HUMANS AND SON.

AT THE SAME TIME WE HIDE FROM HUMANS BY GOING DEEPER AND DESTROYING THE OLD PLACES. THIS IS WHAT WE TEACH OUR CHILDREN. A LEGACY DEFINED BY RELATIONSHIP TO A WEAKER PEOPLE. WE EVEN SAY "THEIR WORLD" INSTEAD OF "OUR WORLD."

CITIZENS OF THIS CITY KNEW THAT SARA WAS ABANDONED BECAUSE IT WAS BUILT TOO FAR FROM MURIA... IT WAS AN OUTER COLONY, BUILT TOO SMALL. A CITY OF THE DEAD.

BENEATH THIS RUBBLE IS THE FOUNDATION OF A CITY BUILT 10,000 YEARS AGO. BENEATH IT, ANOTHER FOUNDATION, HUNDREDS OF YEARS BEFORE THIS CITY WAS BUILT.

HERE BEGAN THE SON REBELLION THAT TOPPLED THE GOVERNMENT AND SET NEW IDEAS FREE.

HERE THIS SPOT IS A PLACE OF REBELLION AND PHILOSOPHY, ART AND POWER, BEAUTY AND FEAR. BEFORE HUMANS WERE HERE.

WE HAVE FORGOTTEN OURSELVES. WE ARE THE BLUE. THE SEA IS EMPTY TO US BECAUSE WE HAVE ABANDONED IT. WE FORGOT IT. WE HAVE FORGOTTEN.

THEIR WORLD.

THE ANSWER ABOVE.

I GROW UP THERE. IT IS MY WORLD TOO. MY FAMILY IS THERE. IT CAN BE OUR WORLD TOGETHER. HUMAN AND BLUE... AND BLACK. ANOTHER PERSON TRIED TO MANIPULATE ME ONCE AND MAKE THE WORLD OVER WITHOUT ME. WILLIAM DIED. THANKFUL FOR HIS DEATH. HE WAS NO HUMAN.

I DO NOT SEEK A WORLD WITHOUT HUMANS. I WISH ONLY TO ENNOBIL OURSELVES TO REMIND THE BLUE.

KILLIAN AND HIS DISSENTERS WERE JUST THAT—DISSENTERS. A SMALL BAND OF ANGRY SOULS LASHING OUT TO CHANGE THE WORLD THROUGH HURT AND VIOLENCE. CHILDREN SEEKING ATTENTION. HE WOULD KILL ANY HOBBLE HIS OWN PEOPLE TO ACCOMPLISH A SMALL TRIFLE. HE WAS MAD. MANY BEFORE HIM. DONE THE SAME. BUT NOW ABOVE. ABOVE THE SURFACE. THIS IS HIS WORLD.

I WANT TO KNOW MORE.

YOU KNOW OF THE EGYPTIANS. DO THEIR PYRAMIDS STAND?

DO YOU KNOW THEIR WAYS?

NO... YOU SEE, THEY FORGOT THEM TOO. SO STAGNANT HAD THEY BECOME THAT THEY FORGOT WHO BUILT THE VERY PYRAMIDS IN THEIR MIDST. THEY WERE WEAKENED BY THE LOSS OF THEIR OWN HISTORY. THEY WERE CONQUERED AND LOST. AND MAIN. NEW KINGS BOASTED THE IMAGE OF THE OLD KINGS.

WE HAD KINGS ONCE TOO. AND NONE NOW KNOW THEM. SO LONG HAVE THINGS BEEN AS THEY ARE THAT WE SEEK TO KILL THEM. THAT WAY, WE CAN BE THE WAITING IN OUR CIVILIZATION ANY DAY. WE CAN BE THE NEW KINGS.

ONE OF OUR OLDEST VERGERS IS NOW A KING.

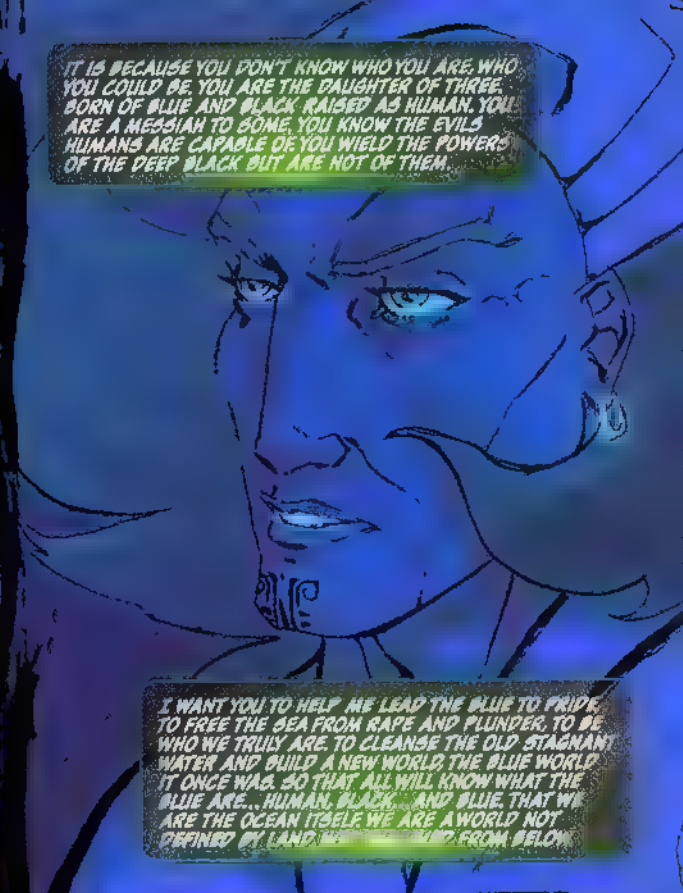
A SIMPLE BEGINNING TO POEMS, PROPHECIES OR FABLES. CHILDREN RECITE IT WITHOUT KNOWING ITS MEANING. DO YOU KNOW IT? IT BEGINS WITH...

FULL CIRCLE ENCLOSED ARE WE. IN COUNCIL, IN KING, IN BOUNDED SEA, FROM BLACK... AND FREE.

YET WHEN THE CHILD TOOK ASKED WHO THE KING WAS, HIS TEACHER SAID HE COULDN'T RECALL AND WASN'T SURE THERE EVER WAS A REAL KING. HOW CAN CHILDREN BE EDUCATED WHEN THE TEACHER IS FORGOTTEN?



IT IS BECAUSE YOU DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE, WHO YOU COULD BE. YOU ARE THE DAUGHTER OF THREE, BORN OF BLUE AND BLACK RAISED AS HUMAN. YOU ARE A MESSIAH TO SOME, YOU KNOW THE EVILS HUMANS ARE CAPABLE OF YOU WIELD THE POWERS OF THE DEEP BLACK BUT ARE NOT OF THEM.



WITH ALL DUE RESPECT, PROFESSOR TOSK, MASACAS OR WHATEVER. I HAVE HEARD YOUR PITCH AND IT HAS BEEN ENLIGHTENING. THE IDEAS ARE NOBLE BUT WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME?

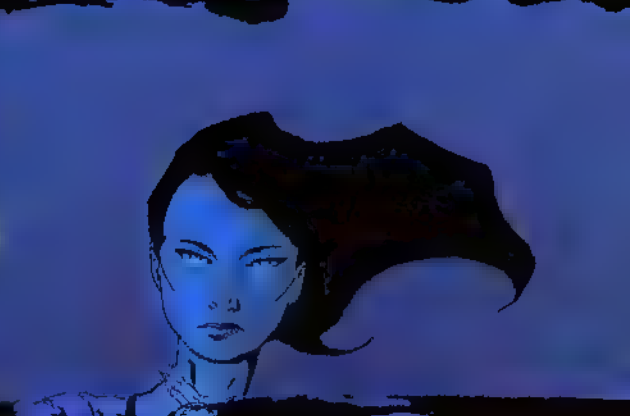
WHY DO YOU KEEP ASKING ME WHO I THINK I AM? WHAT IS YOUR FATED QUESTION?

I WANT YOU TO HELP ME LEAD THE BLUE TO PRIDE, TO FREE THE SEA FROM RAPE AND PLUNDER, TO BE WHO WE TRULY ARE. TO CLEANSE THE OLD STAGNANT WATER AND BUILD A NEW WORLD, THE BLUE WORLD IT ONCE WAS, SO THAT ALL WILL KNOW WHAT THE BLUE ARE... HUMAN, BLACK... AND BLUE. THAT WE ARE THE OCEAN ITSELF WE ARE A WORLD NOT DEFINED BY LAND, WE ARE BORN FROM BELOW.

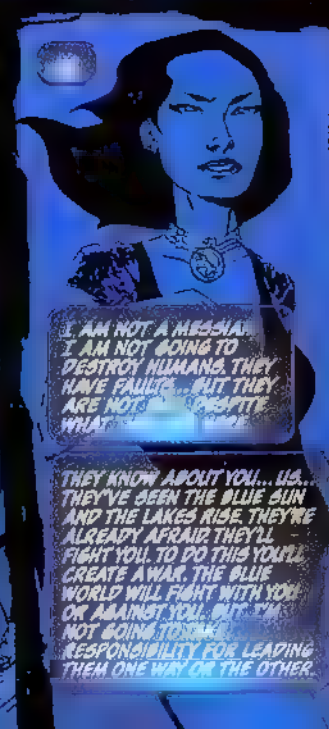


MY QUESTION IS... WILL YOU DO THIS? WILL YOU HELP THE BLUE RISE AGAIN TO BECOME WHAT WE WERE... TO BECOME MORE THAN WE WERE.

WELL... I AM NOT

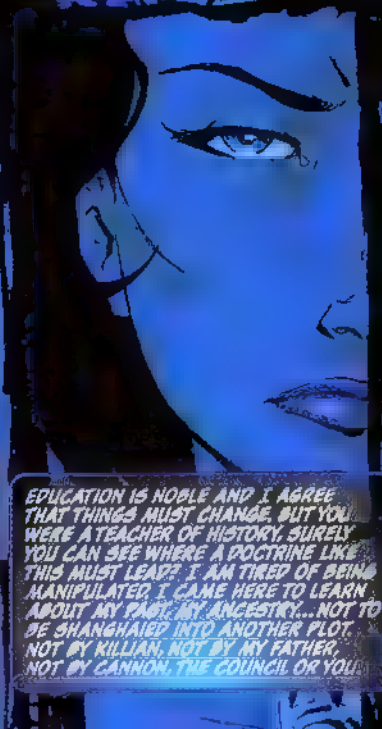


IF YOU CAN READ THOUGHT YOU SHOULD HAVE KNOWN MY DECISION.



I AM NOT A MESSIAH. I AM NOT GOING TO DESTROY HUMANS. THEY HAVE FAULTS... BUT THEY ARE NOT AS DESPITE WHAT SOME SAY.

THEY KNOW ABOUT YOU... US... THEY'VE SEEN THE BLUE SUN AND THE LAKES RISE. THEY'RE ALREADY AFRAID THEY'LL FIGHT YOU. TO DO THIS YOU'LL CREATE A WAR. THE BLUE WORLD WILL FIGHT WITH YOU OR AGAINST YOU. BUT I'M NOT GOING TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR LEADING THEM ONE WAY OR THE OTHER.

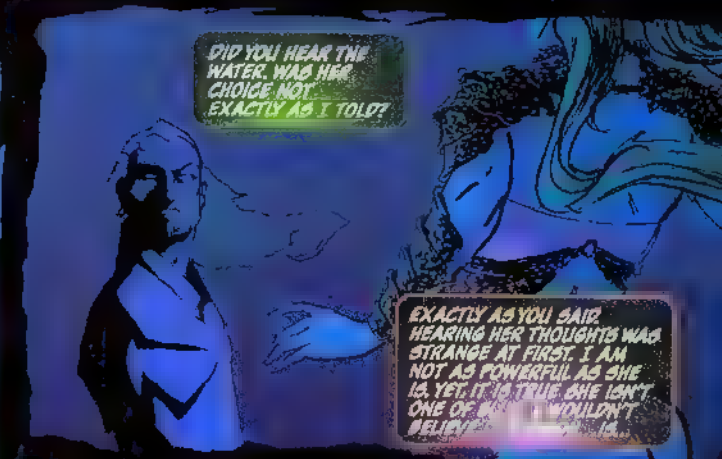
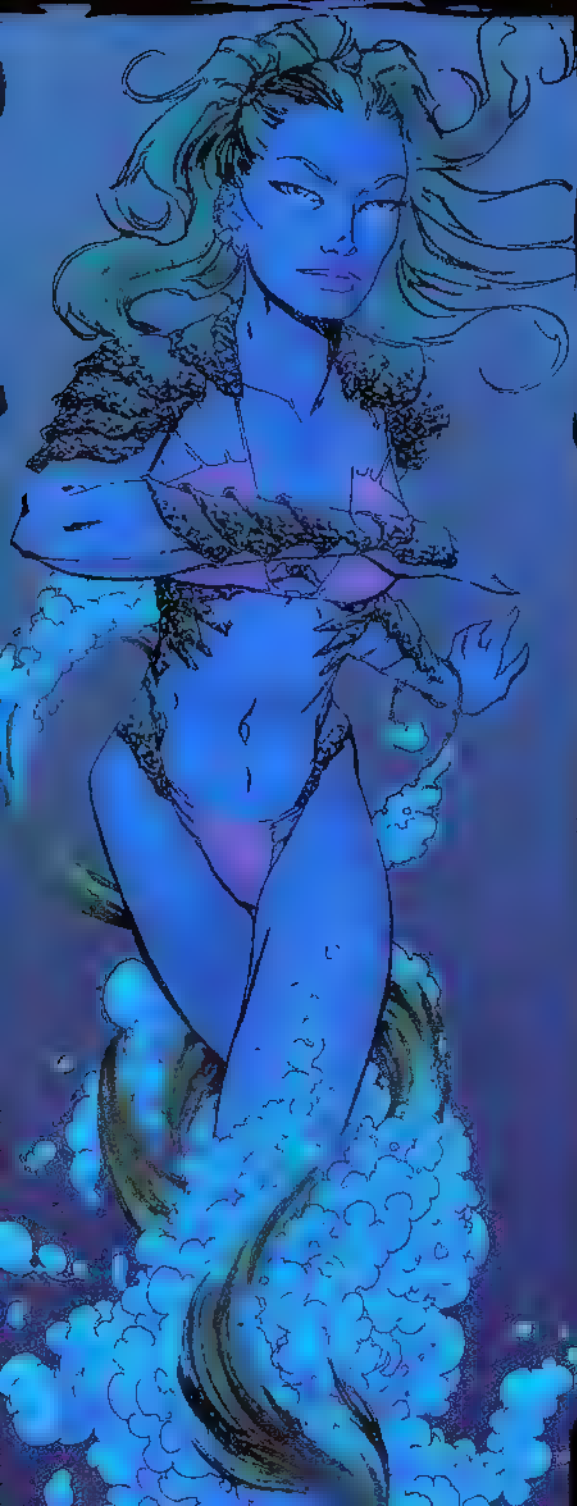


EDUCATION IS NOBLE AND I AGREE THAT THINGS MUST CHANGE. BUT YOU WERE A TEACHER OF HISTORY, SURELY YOU CAN SEE WHERE A DOCTRINE LIKE THIS MUST LEAD? I AM TIRED OF BEING MANIPULATED. I CAME HERE TO LEARN ABOUT MY PAST, MY ANCESTRY... NOT TO BE SHANGHAIED INTO ANOTHER PLOT. NOT BY KILLIAN, NOT BY MY FATHER, NOT BY CANNON, THE COUNCIL OR YOU.





AND NOW WITH
CIRCLE
FIGHT



DID YOU HEAR THE
WATER, WAS HER
CHOICE NOT
EXACTLY AS I TOLD?

EXACTLY AS YOU SAID
HEARING HER THOUGHTS WAS
STRANGE AT FIRST, I AM
NOT AS POWERFUL AS SHE
IS, YET, IT IS TRUE, SHE ISN'T
ONE OF US, I WOULDN'T
BELIEVE IT, SHE IS...



CANNON IS NERVE, HE HAS
TOO MUCH AFFECTION FOR
HER, FOR HUMANITY, HE
RESPECTS THE BLACK AS
A PET RESPECTS ITS
LEASH, WE HAVE BEEN
FREE PEOPLE FOR
THOUSANDS UPON
THOUSANDS OF YEARS, YET
STILL WE FEAR OUR
MASTER'S RETURN, HE IS
WHAT THE COUNCIL AND
SOCIETY HAVE MADE HIM,
HE DOES NOT SEE WHAT I
SEE, HE HAS NOT TASTED
THE OCEANS OF
KNOWLEDGE, HE
DEATHS THE...



MASACAS, I HAVE ONE
QUESTION, YOU SAID
THE BEN REBELLION
BEGAN HERE, IT
TOPPLED THE
GOVERNMENT AND
CHANGED THE WORLD,
I'VE NEVER HEARD OF
IT, I'VE STUDIED ALL
OUR WARS, WHEN DID
IT HAPPEN, WHEN DID
IT BEGIN...



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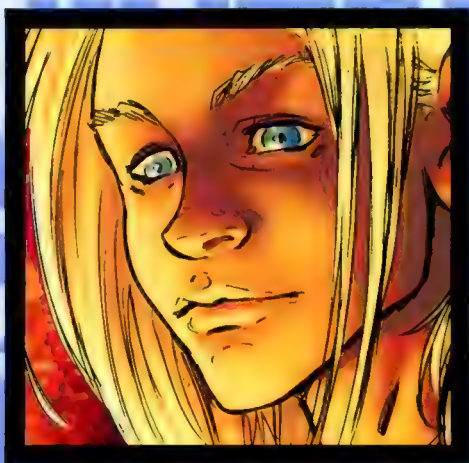
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ASPEN
SEASONS
WINTER 2009
CHAPTER ONE
MICHAEL T. RYDER
SOULFIRE



DESTINY'S
Child

THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING
NOVEL BY
MICHAEL T. RYDER
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
JAMES H. HARRIS



MOST KIDS HAVE FOND MEMORIES OF THEIR EARLY YEARS... NICE HOUSE, FUN TOYS, PARENTS. BUT I DON'T HAVE ANY OF THAT AT THE FARMINGTON HOME FOR BOYS.

I MIGHT HAVE EVEN BEEN BORN THERE FOR ALL I KNOW, BECAUSE I DON'T REMEMBER MUCH OF ANYTHING BEFORE IT.

I WAS KIND OF SMALL FOR MY AGE— STILL AM. YOU CAN IMAGINE HOW THAT WENT OVER IN SUCH A PLACE.

I DIDN'T KEEP TO MYSELF BECAUSE I WAS SHY. I DID IT BECAUSE I GOT TIRED OF GETTING THE CRAP KICKED OUT OF ME.

THE CHARACTERS IN THE BOOKS I READ DIDN'T HAVE ANY PROBLEMS. THEY WEREN'T ABANDONED LIKE GARSME. THEY HAD A LIFE. THEY HAD A PURPOSE. THEY WERE SPECIAL.

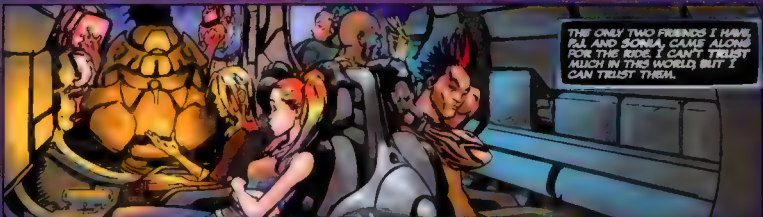
I WANTED TO BE SPECIAL.



AND MAYBE I AM.

THE SAMUSARA— THAT'S WHAT THEY ARE CALLING ME. THE BRINGER OF LIGHT. I'M TO BE THE CATALYST FOR THE RETURN OF MAGIC TO THE WORLD.

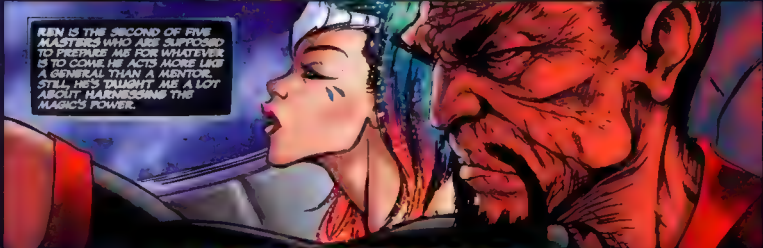
I DIDN'T BELIEVE ANY OF THEIR STORIES AT FIRST, BUT I'M STARTING TO COME AROUND.



THE ONLY TWO FRIENDS I HAVE, PAL AND SONIA, CAME ALONG FOR THE RIDE. I CAN'T TRUST MUCH IN THIS WORLD, BUT I CAN TRUST THEM.



IF IT WASN'T FOR BIRNOST, I'D PROBABLY ALREADY BE DEAD. AS SAN FRANCISCO WAS BURNING TO THE GROUND, HE GOT US OUT OF THE CITY AND HAS STUCK WITH US EVER SINCE.



REN IS THE SECOND OF FIVE MASTERS WHO ARE SUPPOSED TO PREPARE ME FOR WHATEVER IS TO COME. HE ACTS MORE LIKE A GENERAL THAN A MENTOR. STILL, HE'S TAUGHT ME A LOT ABOUT HARNESSING THE MAGIC'S POWER.



WHICH BRINGS ME TO GRACE— THE ONE WHO STARTED ALL OF THIS. SHE KNOWS MORE THAN ANYONE ABOUT WHAT THIS WORLD WAS LIKE BEFORE.

...BECAUSE SHE
WAS THERE.

THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO,
IT WAS A SIMPLER TIME. IT
WAS A BRIGHTER TIME.

IT WAS A
MAGICAL
TIME.

WHERE NOBODY WOULD
GIVE A SECOND GLANCE
AT SEEING PEOPLE
SCOURING IN THE SKIES.

OR DRAGONS FOR
THAT MATTER.

GRACE AND HER PEOPLE
REVELED IN THE MAGIC
OF THEIR AGE, BUT THEY
DIDN'T REALIZE THAT
THE LIGHT WOULD NOT
ENDURE FOREVER.

THAT IT WOULD
GROW DARK.





THAT MAGIC WOULD
LEAVE THIS WORLD

NOT ALL FROM THE
TIME OF MAGIC DIED
BUT THERE WAS ONE
THAT I WISH DID...

RAIMOR.

GRACE TOLD ME HOW RAIMOR
TRIED TO MAKE THE ULTIMATE
POWER PLAY FOR CONTROL
BEFORE THE END OF THE
LAST AGE OF MAGIC. MANY
DIED, BUT GRACE AND HER
PEOPLE STOPPED HIM.

HE STILL LIVES THOUGH,
AND HE'S AS POWER
HUNGRY AS EVER.

BUILT FOR ONE
THING ONLY—
DESTRUCTION.

A large, purple-scaled dragon with glowing blue eyes is breathing a massive stream of fire. The fire is bright orange and yellow, filling the lower half of the page. In the background, a large, multi-eyed face is visible, looking on with a concerned expression. The scene is set against a dark, stormy sky with swirling clouds.

HE EVEN SENT HIS METAL
MONSTROSITY AFTER
ME. APPARENTLY, RAINIER
ISN'T COOL WITH THE IDEA
OF MAGIC'S BIG RETURN.

IT WAS THE MOST
TERRIFYING THING
I'D EVER SEEN.

I THOUGHT I WAS
DEAD FOR SURE.

BUT THERE, BURIED IN
THE FLAMES, I MADE
AN INCREDIBLE
DISCOVERY: I WAS OKAY.

IN FACT, I WAS
BETTER
THAN OKAY.

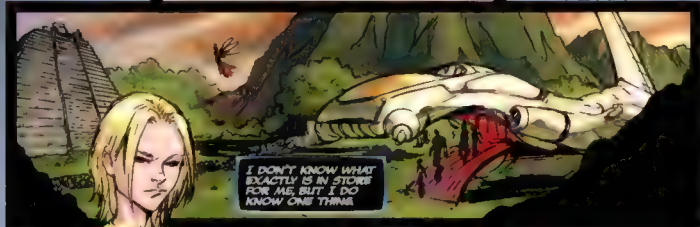
I WAS GREAT.



THAT'S WHEN I STARTED
REALIZING JUST HOW
SPECIAL I REALLY WAS

THIS BEAST DESTROYED
EVERYTHING AND
ANYTHING IN ITS PATH...

...EVERYTHING
EXCEPT ME.



I DON'T KNOW WHAT
EXACTLY IS IN STORE
FOR ME, BUT I DO
KNOW ONE THING



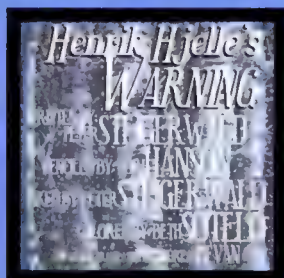
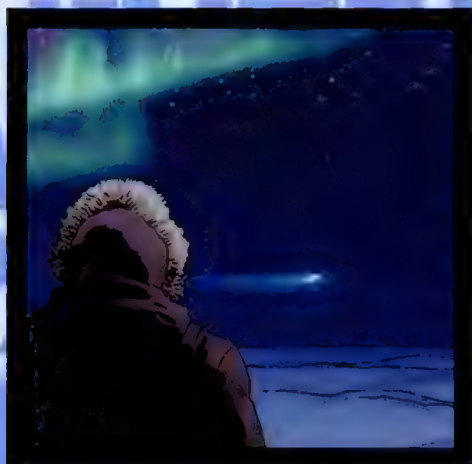
I DON'T NEED
TO READ THOSE
OLD STORIES
ANYMORE...

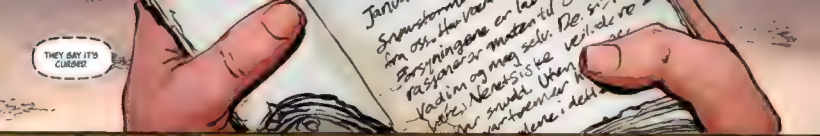


BECAUSE NOW
I'M BECOMING A
TRUE DRAGON
SLAYER.



ASPEN
 SEASONS
 WINTER 2009
 CHAPTER TWO
 MICHAEL TURNER'S
 FATHOM





THEY SAY IT'S
CURSED.

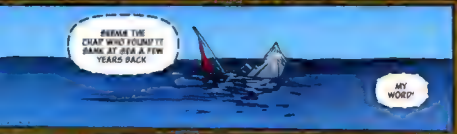
CURSED,
YOU SAY?

THE
DIARY?

SO THEY
SAY, OLD HJELLE
DISAPPEARED
IN A SNOWSTORM.
NEVER FOUND HIS
BODY.

MY
WORD!

...NEXT ITEM
UP FOR BID THE
JOURNAL OF POLAR
EXPLORER HENRIK
HJELLE...



SEARCH THE
CHAP WHO FOUND IT
HARK AT SEA A FEW
YEARS BACK.

MY
WORD!



...CONSPIRACISTS
CLAIM HJELLE FOUND THE
NORTH POLE SEVERAL
YEARS BEFORE
PEARY...

ONE MAN
DRINKING TIME WHISKY
YEARS AFTER ANOTHER
MAN DISAPPEARED IS
HARDLY A
CURSE.

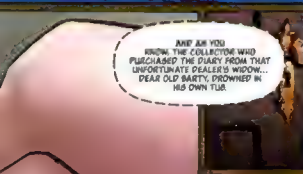
AH, BUT THEY
SAY THE DEALER WHO
BOUGHT THE DIARY WESTWARD
AFTER ONE DEALER IS BELIEVED
DISAPPEARED WITH EXTRANEUS
HJELLE'S ROUTE.

HIRE HIMSELF
A HELICOPTER AND
FLY OVER THE MOUNTAINS
HIT CRASHED INTO THE
ARCTIC SEA.

...THE CONTENTS
OF THE JOURNAL
HAVE BEEN READ ONLY
ENOUGH TO VERIFY ITS
AUTHENTICITY...



MY
WORD!

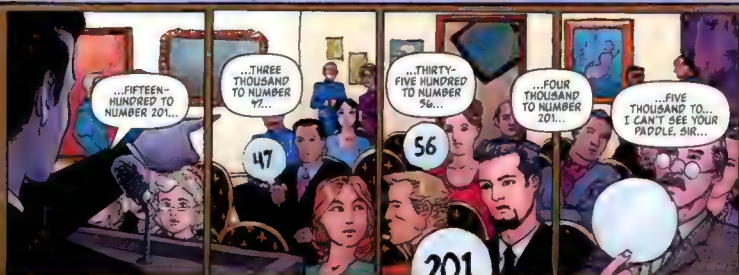
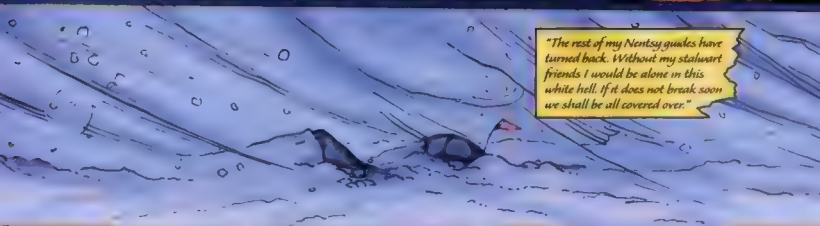
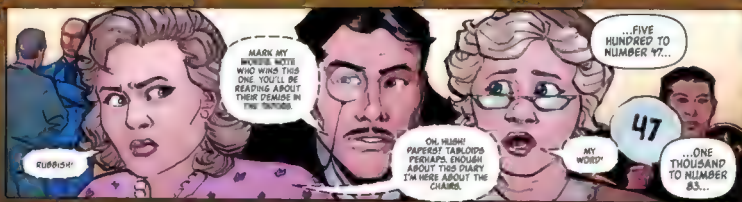


ANY, ARE YOU
KNOWING THE COLLECTOR WHO
PURCHASED THE DIARY FROM THAT
UNFORTUNATE DEALER'S WIDOW...
DEAR OLD BARTY, DROWNED IN
HIS OWN TURN.



MY
WORD!

...ANY SECRETS
OR PROOF HELD WITHIN
ITS BINDING ARE YOURS TO
DISCOVER. SHOULD YOU WIN
THIS ITEM! WE'LL START THE
BIDDING AT FIVE HUNDRED
POUNDS.



"Another day and the storm finally broke. The ice pack stretches out endlessly before us. My compass is useless. We mark our course now by the stars and trust we travel true to our calculations in the daylight."



...EIGHT THOUSAND TO NUMBER 162...

...TEN THOUSAND TO NUMBER 201...

...TWELVE THOUSAND TO NUMBER 162...

201

162

...FIFTEEN THOUSAND TO NUMBER 201...



"Oleg tells stories to keep our spirits up. They killed a seal today so we have fresh meat. Vladimir made an offering of some of the kill to their god Num to keep away Niga their god of evil, who dwells in these northern lands."

...TWENTY THOUSAND FIVE HUNDRED TO NUMBER 162...

THIS IS THE FINAL CALL. IF THERE ARE NO MORE BIDDERS...

162

A NEW BIDDER! TWENTY-TWO THOUSAND TO NUMBER 21 IN THE BACK.

DO I HEAR TWENTY-FOUR?



"As we came around a prominence in the ice, Vadim surprised a hunting polar bear mother and cub. Oleg shot her and the dogs killed the cub, but we lost a sled, three of the dogs and Vadim was too badly mauled."

"I fear he will not live out the night. Oleg wants to turn back. I feel I must press on."



"Vadim did not live past midnight. We cut a hole in the ice and committed him to the sea. We did not feel like sleeping so we packed all that remained and have been traveling all day and night. Oleg has said barely a word and I am alone in my thoughts. I hope history does not find me harsh, but I am saddened at the loss of Vadim, but relieved as our stores will last us longer."



FORTY THOUSAND TO NUMBER 162...

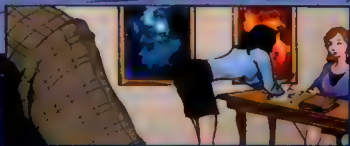


"I do not know what to do. I have lost Oleg to a weakness in the ice. He was tangled in the harness. I was too far to save him"

"Sled, supplies, dogs, my friend and guide all lie at the bottom of the arctic sea. I am alone"

"Vadim and Oleg and all my hopes of reaching the pole and returning have been lost in so short a time."

"I do not want to think bleak thoughts. But, I am turned to thoughts that I am cursed. I shall die here. Alone. At the top of the world. My only consolation is that there is this outcrop in the ice. Perhaps it is an island in summer and my body may be found and the world may know how far I have come"



"The Northern lights are especially bright tonight. This may be my last entry. It is so terribly cold. My hands are frozen nearly black. I have sat here for two days without the strength or will to go on or go back, but I must write of what I have seen"

"Perhaps I am delirious... Or perhaps it is those gods of Oleg that move them"

"I have watched strange lights in the sky-- as if the stars were birds... They move in the heavens, like magic... If I am not insane, I think they are crafts of some sort."

THAT REALLY BELONGS IN A MUSEUM. IT'S A PIECE OF HISTORY.

THANK YOU, SIR.

NOW PLEASE LET ME BY.





THE SIREN'S CALL TO DISCOVER THE POLES WAS IRRESISTIBLE TO THEM-- BUT WE DID NOT THINK THEY WERE AS READY AS THEY WERE FOR SUCH A FEAT. THEY ARE DRIVEN TO EXPLORE. THAT THEY CAME NORTH WAS INEVITABLE. AFTER HESSELS CAME COOK OR PEARLY, DEPENDING ON WHOSE STORY YOU BELIEVE. THEY CAME AND THEY CLAIMED-- THEY PLANTED--
EVEN HENRIK HESSELS AND MAYER

WE WERE READY FOR THEM. WE HAD HIDDEN BETTER. BECAUSE HENRIK WAS OUR WARNING. HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR THIS SAD SAIL, WE MAY HAVE BEEN THE ONES DISCOVERED.

IT LOOKS LIKE THEY LEFT HIM TO THE BEARS BEFORE THEY SET HIM ADRIFT. THEY WERE NOT THINKING.

...AND YET SOMEHOW MANAGED NOT TO PICKUP HIS LITTER.

THE JOURNAL WAS STILL THERE ON THAT TINY ISLAND OVER A HUNDRED YEARS LATER--
PRESERVED BY THE ARTIC WEATHER.

INSTEAD OF SENDING HIM TO THE SEA FLOOR, THEY SET HIM ADRIFT IN THE SOUTHERN CURRENT.

AND THIS IS EXACTLY THE PROOF OF HENRIK HESSELS AND WHAT HE FOUND AT THE TOP OF THE OCEAN.

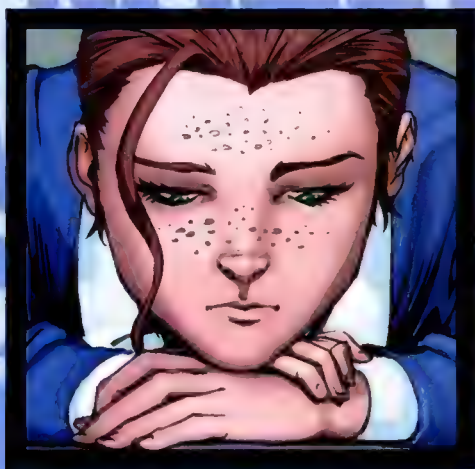
HAD A TOUGH TIME TRACKING HIS SPIRIT EVEN WITH OUR RECORDS OF THE HESSELS. HAD ONE OF THEM FOUND HIM IN CLIMAX, ON THE BEACH, HE WOULD HAVE BEEN DEAD.

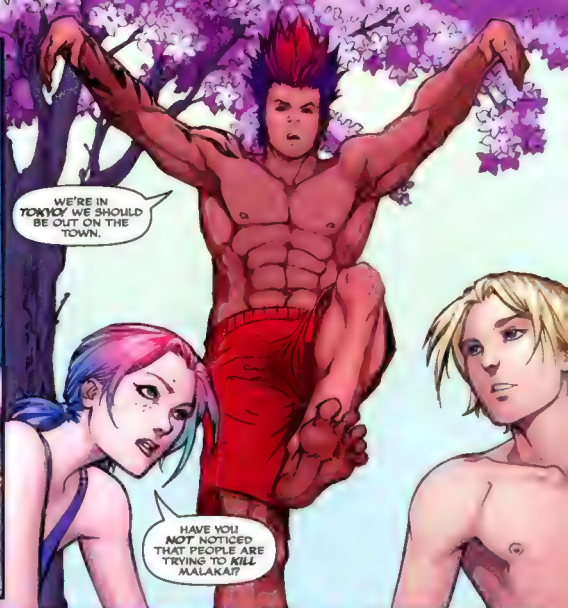
...IT WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN A WARNING. IT WOULD HAVE SIMPLY SPARKED MORE INVESTIGATIONS...

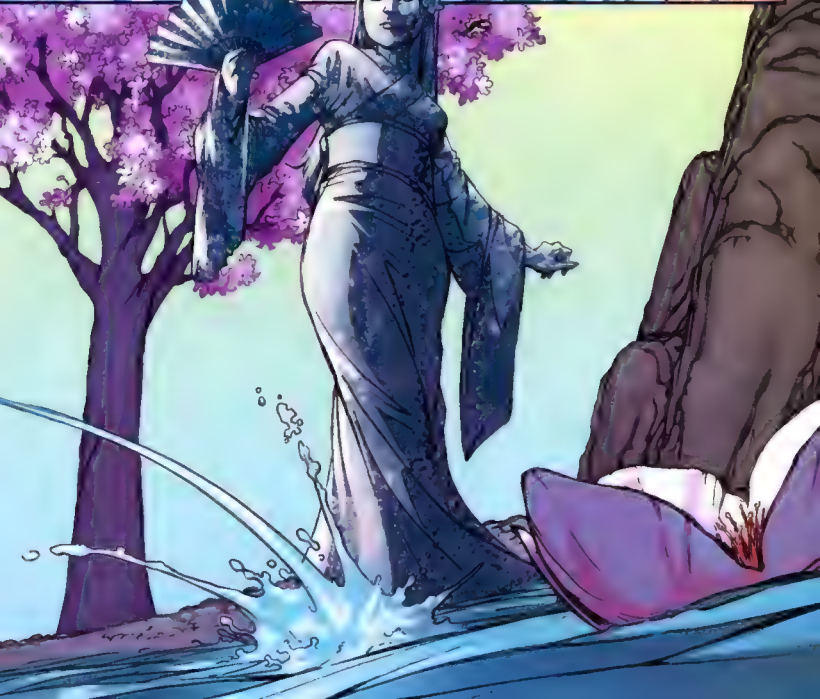
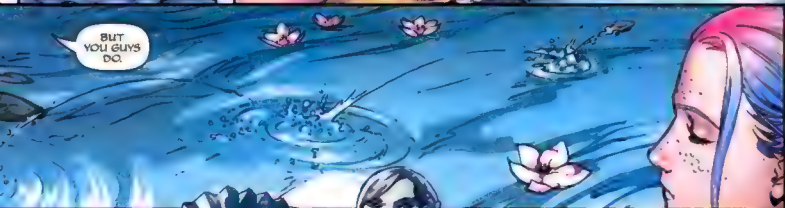
...AND THAT'S THE LAST THING WE KNOW.

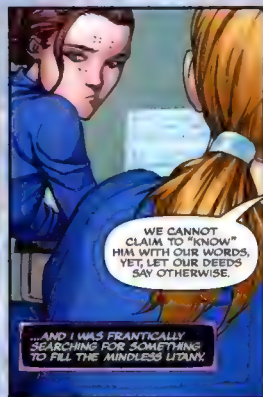
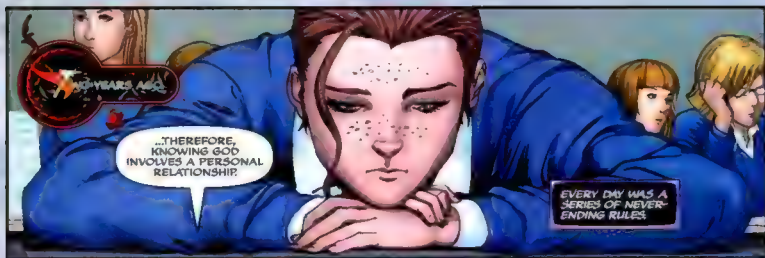
FAREWELL HENRIK. YOU DESERVE BETTER THAN YOU GOT.

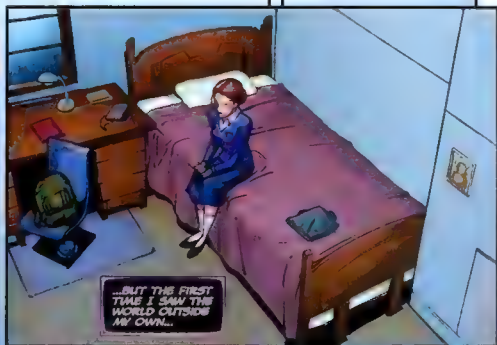
ASPEN
SEASONS
WINTER 2009
CHAPTER THREE
MICHAEL TURNER
SOULFIRE

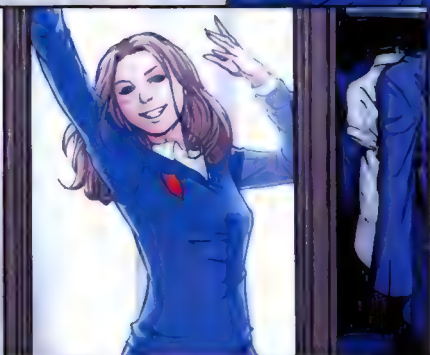
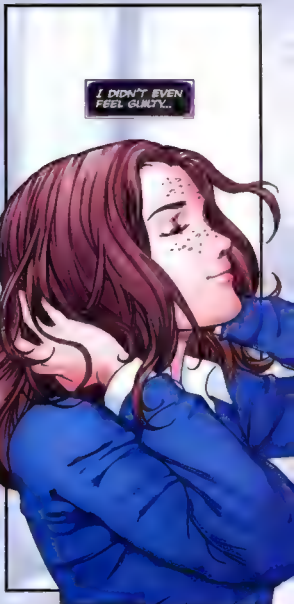


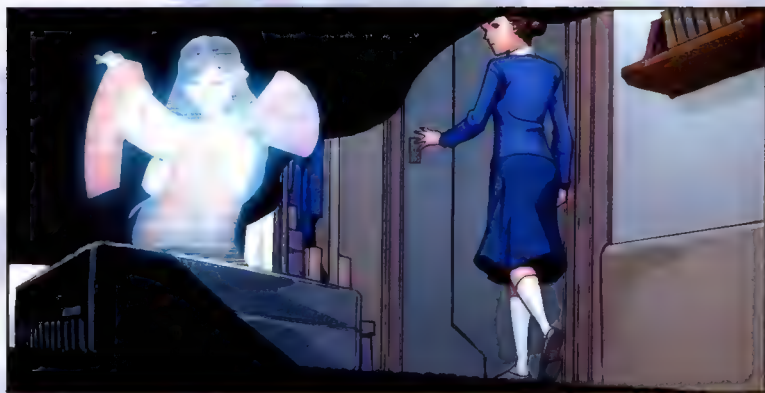


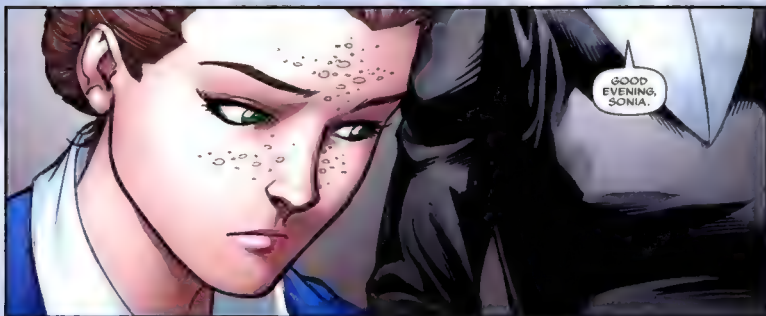












OH LORD, WE
THANK THEE FOR
THE GIFTS WHICH WE
ENJOY AT THIS
TABLE...



...AS YOU
HAVE PROVIDED
FOR US IN THE
PAST...

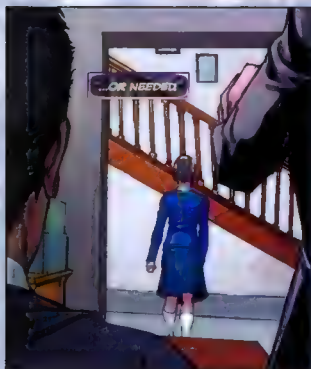
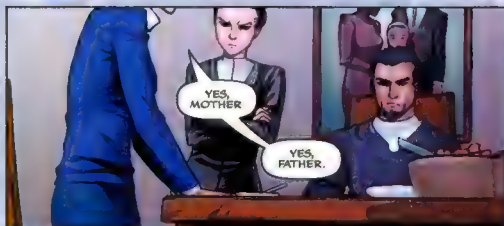
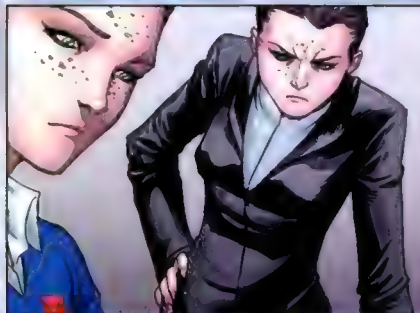
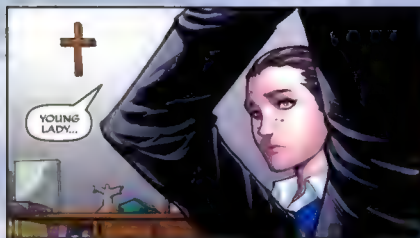
...SO MAY
YOU SUSTAIN US
THROUGHOUT
OUR LIVES...

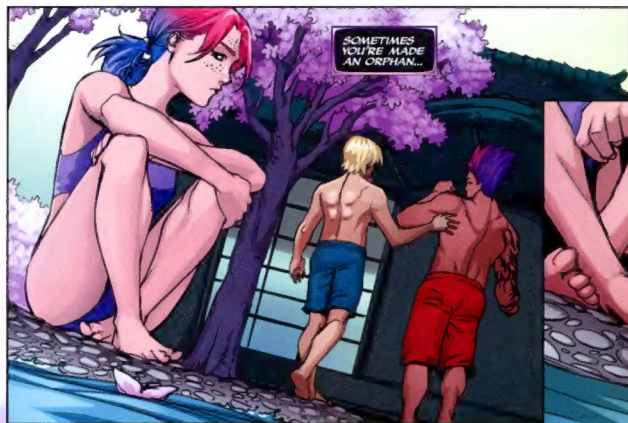
...MAY WE
ENJOY THESE
GIFTS, AND NEVER
FORGET THOU,
WHO GRANTED
THEM...

AMEN

AMEN.

IF ONLY I HAD
NEVER SEEN
THE WORLD OF
POSSIBILITIES...





SOMETIMES
YOU'RE MADE
AN ORPHAN...



...AND SOMETIMES YOU HAVE
TO CHOOSE IT IN ORDER TO
FIND YOURSELF.







